Dog on the Sun

PAUL GREEN

A VOLUME OF STORIES

Dog on the Sun

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MADURAI

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For

NORMAN FOERSTER

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The characters in this book of fiction are entirely imaginary, and no likeness to any person living or dead is intended.

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Dog on the Sun

A dog on the sun,
Fair weather soon gone.

—OLD PROVERB

The Girl the King Loved

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WE MIGHT AS WELL STOP AND EAT OUR dinner here," Mr. Mac said, "then I'll show you the tombstone has to do with one of the valley girls the king of England loved."

"Suits me," I agreed quickly enough, hoping to hear another good story. And so we turned the little Ford car in by the old deserted church, took our food basket out and went over to a big cedar tree which spread a welcome enough shade from the hot May afternoon sun.

It was the week end, and I had come down from the University to go out with my old friend, Mr. Mac, on one of his exploring trips as had become my custom. We'd spent most of the morning down the Cape Fear River near the old lost town of Averysboro investigating the ruins of the ancient canal, locks and dams that had been built there during the latter part of the eighteenth century and later rebuilt and abandoned again before the Civil War.

The churchyard we were stopping in was a lonely sandy little hilltop, surrounded by a ragged tumbled about stone wall, darkened here and there with tall scraggly cedars and sown thick with pallid gray tombstones.

"Yessir, talk about your history now," said Mr. Mac, his eyes glistening with his usual proprietary enthusiasm, "there's more history buried in this ground hereabouts, son, than anywhere in the whole of the Cape Fear River country. You can go up and down this valley, from the old town of Haywood to the north there, down two hundred miles to Southport on the sea, and no place to my way of thinking equals this very spot for romance, tragedy, comedy, or whatever you want to name it, whether it be faded dreams or dreams fulfilled. Of course little or none of it's known to the outside world, and none of the people who sleep here ever caused any big doings like the lady in the wars of Troy or the iceberg that sunk the *Titanic*. But what each of them did and what happened to them as individuals meant just as much maybe to the final sum-up of the truth of things. And that truth is what we all seek for, ain't it, and what we'd like to know. Well, here's a good place to seek it."

"I've been over here many a time copying down epitaphs," I said, "but I never found any tombstone that had to do with the king's sweetheart."

"You wouldn't, son," Mr. Mac replied a little curtly and enigmatically. "You've got to live around here a long time, hear the tales told and handed down, know the people. And that I've been doing for some seventy-odd years or more. You're young yet and just beginning. But before we get on the main subject and how it illustrated a great human truth let's have a bite to eat."

We opened our basket and had our lunch—pork barbecue, milk, sandwiches, coca-cola, and some fruit. Mr. Mac, as was his custom, drank the milk, ate a sandwich and an apple.

When we had finished, he leaned back against the body of the tree and cut off a chew of his usual sweet flagroot for his digestion's sake and put it in his mouth. "Yessir, here in this graveyard lies buried every kind of person you can think

about," he went on—"drunkards, thieves, murderers, one or two statesmen, broken-hearted sweethearts, loving mothers, proud fathers, old men, young men, old women, young women, children and babies. And nearly every one of them—and that goes for some of the babies too—had some story connected with them. For a fact you might say the world lies here. And every kind of human longing, pain and deed have had their hushing in these few acres of hungry earth."

"And I'm sure you know most all the stories connected with them, Mr. Mac," I said, "for I know some of them myself."

"Well, I have ground meal for a many one of these dead at my watermill, and said good morning and good night to them too. And some I've helped lay out on the cooling-board, just as some day somebody will have to help lay me out and bring me here to sleep at the last." Then he sighed and looked off with his half-wistful smile and a fine tracery of wrinkles around his clear blue eyes. "Still, this is a mighty good place to sleep. It's quiet here. In the evening time you can hear the cowbells beyond the hill there, and a boy giving his holler in the fields about dusk-down, and the swamp angel bird singing now and then. Yes, it's good earth to rest in."

We were silent for a moment as I waited for the main story, and Mr. Mac scratched the top of his scraggly proud head a bit—a way he had when somewhat embarrassed by a touch of feeling.

"That looks like a tombstone over there," I said after a moment, pointing to a mass of upreared greenery, honeysuckle and trumpet vine, some ten or twelve feet high. Mr. Mac chuckled a bit, shook his head and stared at the ground.

"Now that's the story, or rather the stories, I was going to tell you," he said. And lifting his gaze he stared a moment out before him. "By dog, looks like nature is about to eat up man's handiwork here in old Summerville churchyard, it does.

And the loving relative descendants have clean forgot a lot of their folks, including old Martin Clark. That's his tombstone all matted over. The point of what I've got to tell don't exactly come out in him, as I'll show you, though he had a deep and direful hand in it, nor in his daughter Loveday, who maybe suffered more than many others concerned.

"And as for this same daughter, she is worse forgot than any and lies buried in the edge of the field out there in the colored plot beyond the wall. Yes. She rests among the Negroes and the old slaves with her bastard son, and both long ago have been plowed over and forgot, and all for a reason.

"But once the finest monuments ever seen in the country marked the graves of this same Loveday Clark and her son Dessie, finer than old Martin's there. After the Civil War the Ku Kluxers got big timber carts and dragged the great stones off and dumped them in the river down below MacAllister's Falls. Young John Marsden took the lead in it. He was a hot Negro-hater in those days all right—just like his son, our Mayor Marsden, is in these, and there in the river the monuments lie to this hour. On a day when the water is still and the sun is shining in it you can see them lying there and can read some of the loving inscriptions cut deep upon them—'the honored name of mother',—'in Paradise to meet' —words that the catfish and eels swimming above will never be able to read....

"Hmn, listen to that swamp angel singing in the thicket there. It's a hermit thrush, you know—the real name. They love to make their music when the sun gets low and the cool shadows stretch way out long 'mongst the trees. There's no bird in the world sings more beautiful, not even the mockingbird. And the nightingale the English talk so much about maybe must be mighty fine too, but I doubt there's any songster anywhere equal to the Cape Fear River swamp angel. Yes, it's mighty purty."

"Well, a long time ago back before the Revolutionary War, there used to be a courthouse and the makings of a settlement on the banks of the river down below here. It's all disappeared now like the ancient town of Averysboro we saw this morning. Old Martin Clark lived near this settlement, and one day there wandered up to his house a black man. Nobody knew where he came from. He just appeared. And he spoke some sort of barbaric language that none could understand. Tradition tells that he was tall and well-made and handsome for one so black, and had a lordly manner and a proud fine eye. As for clothes, he wore some kind of a turban, a robe, and sandals—all an outlandish garb. He was homeless and hungry. And this Clark, who they say was always out for what he could get, took him in. Of course he advertised by word of mouth and on the billboards in the courthouse that he had picked up a runaway slave and the owner could get same by identifying him and paying expense of board and keep plus the notice.

"The days went by and nobody showed up to claim the fellow. So Clark was mighty glad to keep him and put him to work with the rest of the Negroes. Before long this strange black man, who called himself by a name that sounded something like 'Osmic,' showed he was head and shoulders above the other slaves around him. Clark presently made him a kind of overseer and set his daughter Loveday, who was mistress of the house in the place of her dead mother, to teach him to speak a little English. She worked dutifully with him as a daughter should, and Os learned fast. But he never did tell much of his past history. Some said he must have been the son of a Negro king in Africa and had escaped from a slave ship to make his way up the river. Anyhow, the tale goes that he had all the dignity and solemn bearing that royal blood is supposed to have. And because of his manner the other slaves soon addressed him as Cap'n—'Cap'n Os,' they called him. He proved to be such a good overseer that Clark finally would go

off for weeks at a time on other business and leave him entirely in charge.

"In those days the people raised a lot of cattle in the valley and would drive them in the fall down to Southport where they would be put on board and sent up as far as Philadelphia to be sold for beef. It was told that famous old Jennie Bahn McNeill, my great grandmammy, used to do that and that was how she struck up a friendship with Benjamin Franklin as everybody hereabouts has heard.

"Well, under the fine handling of Cap'n Os old Martin Clark's business thrived no little. And soon along with all his other holdings he had about the biggest herd of cattle ever seen in the valley. When the market time came along that year he decided he himself would accompany them north and tend to the selling, though in years before he had lumped his few cows and steers in with the other neighbors' and paid his part of the expense. So knowing that everything was safe and snug under Cap'n Os's hand, he set out.

"He was gone for several weeks. Then his daughter Loveday got a letter saying he had had big success with his cattle and there weren't none could match them for quality and price. And he said tell Os how he owed it all to him, and because everything was in good hands at home, he was planning to go on up further north to New York. He wanted to buy plenty of supplies for his business to be shipped back to Wilmington by boat, he said, and he would be home with some nice Christmas presents for her in December. And, darling child, he said, some of the clothes he was bringing her would make her look prettier than ever for young Squire Loftin and the marriage in the fall. December came and went and Martin hadn't returned. He wrote later that he had been down sick for months in that wretched northern climate and his life had been despaired of, but thanks be to Almighty God and a lot of fine

bleeding by the surgeons he was now recovered and would be sailing home again as soon as he recovered his strength.

"One night in early summer he arrived. And the sight and sound that met his eyes and ears embittered him and changed his life forever. In fact it put him in his grave there under that stone long before his time. The house was full of candles like a wedding feast, and the old slave grannies were running back and forth in Loveday's bedroom same as addled old hens. At first Martin was deceived and thought they'd all got news of his coming.

" 'Thankee, thankee for this great welcome, my loyal darkies!' he roared out in jubilant spirits as he came up on the big piazza. 'And where is the apple of my eye, my loving daughter Loveday?' But Loveday didn't come to meet him. And why not? Because just an hour before this she had given birth to a baby. And more than that, it was a Negro baby, as the old man learned when he pushed his way into her room. And for a minute he stood there shivering and trembling like a thunder-blasted tree. But only for a minute.

"For then torment was to pay, and the world upside down. They say you could hear old Martin Clark blaspheming and whipping the two old granny women a mile away. Then the racket dropped quiet and still, for Clark was struck with some sort of stroke and fell on the floor like a heavy log. With a lot of fanning, blowing and liquor they finally revived him and helped him out on the piazza. There he sat till daybreak in the cold night air, saying never a word. And as the sun was rising above the tall pines along the river, he staggered in, snatched that baby from its mother's arms and went reeling away into the swamps. Later he came back alone and started up the business of checking the farm matters with the overseer, Cap'n Os.

"The next day he told Os there was a power of new timber he wanted to cut soon and would he go over to the Barbecue

Creek section with him to have a look at it. So with Os and two buck Negro slaves he drove off up the road. That night when he returned Os wasn't with him. And they do tell that old Martin had got him off into the woods, and these two buck slaves at his word had set upon the Negro overseer when his back was turned and beat his brains out with two iron pry-bars. They dug a hole there in the woods, buried him, covered him up with trash and logs, and no man knows till this day exactly the place he was buried. In later years when one of these slaves was on his death bed he told what had happened.

"Well, as you might expect, the young daughter Loveday was in a case of hysterics. But different from most women's hysterics, hers wouldn't stop. And during the following night she turned into almost a madwoman calling for her baby. Naturally, she didn't know then that anything had happened to Os. It was the baby she thought about. Finally the old grannies came out, got down on their knees to their master and said Missie Loveday was gwine die eff'n he didn't bring that baby back. Old Martin went wobbling off down the lane leaning on his walking stick to get away from them. But they still followed, begging and wringing their hands. And every now and then he would turn and strike at 'em with the stick like beating off snakes. But they kept on following and pleading, moaning and crying.

"The next morning the family doctor came and sized up the situation. He went out on the breezeway where old Martin sat with one of his arms hanging down stiff and talked to him for an hour or two. The upshot was that he finally persuaded Martin to let the old grannies go into the woods and get the baby's body and bring it back to its mother. So they did.

"But wonderful to be told, the baby was still alive and well. They found it under a bush at the root of a great poplar tree in a path where the wolves walked. And not a hair of the little creature's head had been touched. So here came the old gran-

nies, slobbering and cackling for joy, with the baby wrapped up in Aunt Prudence's apron and hugged close in her arms. Then they put it back to its mother to nurse. And soon Loveday began to mend. When she was finally up and about the house, she kept looking for Os, but in vain. At last she asked her father where he was, and the old man said he'd gone off and wouldn't be coming back, nevermore would be coming back.

"Yes, Os was the father of this baby, and old Martin knew it as soon as he had got one good look at this child—and everybody else knew it—and he had lost no time in taking his revenge.

"But revenge or no revenge, he never held up his head again the way he once had and was never as loud and brash as he had been at the cockfightings and the racings. But still he tried to make the best of the fact that the child had been born and was going to live and that Loveday loved it clear to the gates of heaven.

"Finally the question of naming it came up. Old Martin was stubborn and quavered out that he'd be bedeviled and bedamned if it should bear any name of his, his folks or his wife's folks. 'But us got to name it, Marse Martin,' said old Prudence.

" 'Ain't it the truth,' old Charity spoke up. 'Bad luck to let a baby go too long widdout no name.'

" 'Then you name it,' said old Martin. 'You decide. I'll have nothing to do with it.'

" 'Dat make a good name,' said old Prudence.

" 'What?' said Martin.

" 'Decide,' she answered.

" 'And us found 'um by a tree,' said Charity.

" 'Then by God we'll call him that,' said old Martin with impish glee. 'For by the beards of all the prophets including Moab, it's the most hellish and outlandish thing that could ever happen to a God-fearing man. So give him a hellish and

outlandish name, and let it be a curse upon him.' And rising up, he smote the air with his stick and declared that from that day forth the baby should go under the name of Decide Bytree. So it was. And from Decide Bytree, it got to be Dessie Butree.

"The days passed on, the months came and went, and time rolled down the hill into the great sea of eternity as it always does. And old Martin Clark for the few years he lived got more and more used to the fact that he was saddled with a mulatto grandson. And though Loveday went nowhere any more, neither to church nor to the sociables, she seemed to get more and more like her old self and soon was set in the quieter way of her life, helping to look after the plantation matters and mothering her son. The only grief that ate in her heart was for Cap'n Os. Maybe she realized that her father had had him murdered. But so far as anybody ever heard, she never mentioned it, nor would he ever let the name of Os pass his lips again. What was done was done!

"In a short while old Martin died from a second stroke, and his property fell to Loveday. She dutifully put up that monument there to him and went on with running the plantation. She handled it well, too. She poured all her love on Dessie and taught him in books and raised him into a fine upstanding lad. People said he had all the beauty of both his father and mother, and had his father's fine devastating proud eye, and was restless and strong-willed like both his parents. Of course the setup with the slaves must have been a little difficult, and that maybe might have had something to do with Dessie's running off and joining Washington's army when he was about sixteen years old. He fought at Princeton, was wounded at Monmouth and was in on the surrender at Yorktown. It was said that Washington himself commended the boy for his bravery.

"While he was thus off to the wars his mother sickened and died. She left word she wanted to be buried where her son would lie. That's how she got put out in the edge of the field there beyond the wall among the Negroes. Why they didn't start a new graveyard with her on the old plantation I don't know. It must have been the rebellious relatives and angry neighbors that shamed her so much at the last. So Dessie came back to the valley and took charge of the plantation after her and put up a great marble shaft to his mother that stood there looking proudly over the wall at the humbler white-folks graves.

"They said he had his father's gift of authority and management, and things prospered under him. And besides, he got a big grant of land that had belonged to one of the exiled Tory neighbors, old Simon Campbell. But so far as the white folks were concerned, he was an outcast. Still he went on looking after his timber and cattle and minding his own business. And the old Clark holdings increased in size and power. One of Aunt Prudence's granddaughters was a fine looking light mulatto girl and Dessie married her when he was far past middle age, and well he could for she was his own slave. To them was born a daughter which they named Prudence, after her great-grandmammy, the old slave.

"By this time Dessie had accumulated mergins of money and wealth, and he began to think that somehow he could lift his daughter out from under the curse of Negro blood. So he started putting on the dog. He bought himself a fine carriage and would go driving through the neighborhood with his wife and young child. Everybody said that Prudence was the prettiest thing that ever walked in the country up to that time, both as a girl and later as a young woman. But Dessie's hopes of having her properly married were few and far between. Later on he decided to build her a mansion and put her up like a young princess. For after all, he said, there is

royal blood in her veins. So he set to building the great house overlooking the river.

"Among the carpenters, masons and workmen, was a young white man named David Knight, who Dessie liked the looks of. And beautiful Prudence liked him too as her father found out, but of course at a great distance. The girl was a quadroon, and the shame of Negro blood—as Mayor Marsden puts it when he gets to ranting among his friends for white supremacy and votes in the courthouse—was obvious in her creamy dark skin. One day old Dessie was talking to Knight about some bit of carving up in Prudence's big bedroom that was to be. And he said to him, 'Here I am, with wealth untold, a mighty mansion I'm building, and one daughter—a daughter more beautiful than any girl in all the land. And yet what happiness is there in it for me or her?'

" 'Don't talk like that, Dessie,' said Knight, who like all the white men called the lordly Negro by his first name.

" 'Her blood's as proud as any in this valley, and yet here she must live and die alone. If I could find me some honest young white man who would take care of her, love her—yes, I mean marry her, for there's no law against it—I would die happy and he would be fixed for life.'

"That David Knight was a young fellow with an eye for the main chance, and maybe he already half loved the gentle and lovely Prudence. Anyhow he spoke up and said, 'Dessie, you've found your man.'

"So it was. The house was finished—you can see the rock foundations of it down there near Linton to this day—and when it was all furnished and complete, David Knight and Prudence Butree were married and moved in. And it was said Dessie had to bribe the local magistrate with a yoke of fine steers and forty acres of land to get him to perform the ceremony.

"In time Dessie died and was buried over there beyond

the wall by his mother and with a monument just as grand. And David and Prudence carried on in his stead. Several children were born to them and educated by private tutors at home, for still the neighborhood wouldn't accept them as equal enough to let them go to the white school. The youngest of the daughters was also named Loveday, and she was said to be the queen of beauty in this valley, far outshining her mother Prudence. All the children were mighty handsome. And wherever you meet the strain of that blood in the valley today, you can tell it. There's still the fine features, the flash of the eye, and the springy upstanding form. No wonder Knight had to keep a watchful eye out to protect Loveday from the low-down young white planters who might want to lay lustful hands upon her.

"One autumn two Canadian timbermen came through the valley prospecting into the rich tar and turpentine forests. One of them was a young fellow with mighty fine manners and as fine clothes, they said. Now David Knight owned thousands of acres of the best forests ever seen, left to him by old Dessie. The men stayed at his mansion a few days while he took them round and about. And they got onto the embarrassment that bothered David concerning his children. They happened to mention to him that no such race feeling existed in Canada and that might be a good place to send his daughters to school. So David did send Loveday up there, she being the prettiest and the pride of them all.

"It was there in Montreal or Toronto at a party once she met the Prince of Wales. He was making one of his goodwill tours for his Mammy, Queen Victoria, in those days. So he met her and fell head over heels in love with her. I've seen some letters written back by the people she boarded with telling how the young prince went wild over her beauty. But of course he didn't marry her. He couldn't, color or no color, he being of English royal blood. And besides she may not have loved him.

For after she came back from school the news soon went around that she was engaged to marry that same Canadian young fellow who had come on the timber exploration before. And he was nobody's small fry either, for they said there'd never been a wedding like the one she had there in the mansion by the river. This Canadian was a sort of lord's son, and came to claim his bride in a great turnout of carriages and tasseled horses, and on the front carriage was some kind of coat-of-arms and strange device. And the crush of people that crowded around the Knight mansion at the wedding was a sight to behold. All the valley was there, for David had sent out a general invitation, and curiosity had overcome prejudice.

"So Loveday was married and went away to Canada to live. And that was a good thing, for blood is blood and it's pretty much all the same if given a chance. That's the truth. And Cap'n Os's blood couldn't have been worse than the decayed pure white Scotch and American blood you see hanging around these filling stations and riding drunk on the highways —whose ancestors fought at Flodden Field and Culloden and at Moore's Creek and who still claim proud kin with that glutton and drunkard Bonnie Prince Charlie.

"In time Loveday and her husband got to be great folks in Canada. When his father died he became a lord and she became a lady. And when visiting potentates and royalty came over to Canada in after years, they would be entertained in my lord and lady's house. For by that time Loveday's husband had become a power among men in that part of the Empire. Then in later years Loveday told in some of her letters how she and her family were invited to England and how they had gone and stayed in Buckingham Palace and how gallant the prince, now become the king, was to her. From her words you could imagine that he still loved her. And though you can see from the pictures of his wife, the queen, and others in books to this day that maybe they were all mighty fine ladies, yet it's

not hard to understand how the great monarchs of such ruling families might have loved somebody else.

"So that's the way the story was, and things are pretty much over and done with so far as they are all concerned. Loveday is dead and buried in Ottawa. Her husband is dead likewise, and their two sons are dead—one was killed in the Boer War and the other died leading a charge there in Flanders Field to make the world safe for democracy. The old king and queen are dead, and only the royal grandchildren and their mother remain alive. And I wonder if sometimes there in London, even with all this trouble going on, any of them ever think of the beautiful Cape Fear River girl that once their grandfather knew and loved. But of course maybe they have never heard of the river nor of her.

"Well, the sun's going down in the top of the trees, I see, and we'd better be leaving. Listen to that swamp angel!"

"That was an interesting tale all right, Mr. Mac," I said as we chugged on back toward home a little later.

"And it's only one of many that's had their beginning or ending hereabouts," he murmured, "as you well know. And I'm glad you're writing them down."

"And what was the truth you said it illustrated."

The old miller gave his dry chuckle and shifted his spare form under the rickety steering wheel. "The big truth, son, the truth that is first and foremost in human nature if we could only learn it—that love and time can break down all prejudices, break down all walls. And good it is, so that the human race can survive.

"Yes, sir, some of our best valley families of today are now descended from Dessie Butree's blood—lawyers, doctors, professors, even Congressmen, yes, Negro blood. After the impressive marriage of Loveday Knight with the English lord, the valley people here finally began to accept the other Knight

children as equals in their schools and churches and marry with them. Yes."

We were now passing through the little village of Summerville. In front of the Baptist Church beyond the square I noticed a group of people and a number of cars parked along the street and in the driveway.

"Must be a funeral," I observed. "I wonder who's dead." But even as I spoke, down out of the church came a young man and woman dressed in finery and followed by a group of laughing chattering companions. "Why, it's a wedding and that's the bride and groom," I said.

"Well, I be dog," Mr. Mac exclaimed. And the car swerved a bit under his loosening hand. "So it is, and I had plumb forgot it. Mayor Marsden's son has just married one of the Ferguson girls."

After a moment he went on. "Old human nature has a way of making everything work out, given time, hasn't it? Like I said. And I reckon you noticed as we drove by how dark and pretty the young bride is. Yes, her mother was one of the Knights. She is a direct descendant of that strange black man, Cap'n Os. And she's got a lot of Negro blood in her."

"Whoo!—and wouldn't it be something if Mayor Marsden ever found that out," I said.

"Oh, he knows it all right, like everybody else," the miller replied. "But of course nobody would ever think of mentioning it. You see, it ain't really Negro blood any more with them. It's another kind of Negro blood they hate." He shook his head, chuckled and added—"Whatever kind that is."

The Ghost in the Tree

About dusk-down the old miller and I arrived at Lawton's shack of a farmhouse and hallooed him out. He was already set to go on the hunt, and little Purefoy, his Negro helper, had the two dogs Spot and Bo-peep tied with plowline, waiting in the yard. Lawton was a swarthy heavy-set man with the mark of the glutton and sot-drunkard upon him. Next to the making of liquor, 'possum-hunting was his passion.

"Better drive up the wire road a piece, Mr. Mac," he said. "Down back of the old Gregory place muscadines and 'simmons is thick as the children in the wilderness."

"Yessuh, 'possums use mighty plentiful up there," little Purefoy chirped up encouragingly.

We set off, and after driving a few miles, left the car parked in a little black-jack nook by the road and went into the forest for the hunt. And for two hours or more we tramped and waited about, but only once did Spot or Bo-peep show any signs that a 'possum had ever visited in the Gregory woods. Beyond a few uncertain yelps down in a bamboo morass, they had been as silent as the grave.

And so we kept on walking in the night, until our feet

were sogged through. Finally we persuaded Lawton to stop and let us build a fire.

"Everybody tells what a good hunter you are, Lawton," said the old miller, now standing with his back to the fire of dried twigs and old broken pine rails, his palms crossed outward behind him to the blaze.

"I just hunt for the fun of it," Lawton said. "And sometimes you catch 'em and sometimes you don't." His voice was a little hard and insolent, and he seemed restless and ill at ease.

"What's the biggest 'possum you ever caught?" I asked, hoping to get him started talking. For he was well-known for his anecdotes, story-telling and drolleries as well as bootlegging.

"I ketched one that bent the scales at twenty-two pounds once—right over there on the old Barclay place, I did," he said.

"That weren't a 'possum—that was a calf," the miller scoffed. "You should a-sold it for veal."

Little Purefoy snickered, spat through his teeth and whirled over on the ground.

Lawton went on, ignoring the miller. "Yes, we ketched him —at least me and my daddy did. But that's one 'possum nobody et. Maybe the thing's children are still loose in these woods somewhere to this day—or maybe he is hisself, for they do say a 'possum lives all-fired long, like a' elevent or tairpin."

"That's news to me," said the miller.

"I'm wet as a drowned rat," I said.

We scratched up some piles of straw and sat down in a semi-circle like Indians around the fire, our feet stretched out to the drying warmth.

"Yeh—I was a shirt-tail boy then," Lawton continued slowly and musingly, looking up through the leafless twiggy

trees, as if the image of his past remembrance were mirrored somehow there in the cold clear moonlit sky.

"Listen at 'em, listen at 'em!" Purefoy called as he crawled up on his knees. Far away the dogs could be heard barking now as if on a hot trail.

"And it's all for nothing," I said, "let 'em bark. We're mighty well set up here."

"Dogs never bark for nothing," the morose Lawton said.

"In that way they've got more sense than human beings," the miller said.

"You're dad-dag right," Lawton affirmed heartily. He lifted his shaggy head to send forth his hallooing call of "Go on, Man!" then stopped and sat listening with his mouth open. Presently he lowered his head, staring at the ground.

"Guess you're right. Don't 'spect there's much to that," he mumbled. Then he lifted his face and looked around at us. "And I tell you, I don't care what kind of 'possum it might be, if they tree him out there around the old Barclay place he can stay there till Gab'el toots his horn."

"What old Barclay place?" I asked. I sensed a story coming.

"Over there," he replied, with a backward jerk of his head. " 'Bout a hundred yards from here you come to the edge of what was once a big field, and off in that old field you can see a tangle of cedars and honeysuckles and scrubs, and one big 'simmon tree rising high above it. That's where the old Barclay place used to stand. But it don't stand there no more. You've hearn of old Squair Barclay, Mr. Mac?"

"I have that," said the miller. "And 'twas said as a boy he served wine to LaFayette the time he passed down the valley in twenty-four. And old Pegleg Santa Anna, the Mexican, was fed at his father's house that time they were taking him to Washington a prisoner."

"Yeh, that's him, no doubt," Lawton nodded, "though he

died long before my time." And leaning out on his elbow he began digging in the ground with a stick. Presently he went on—"Well, some folks believe in ghosts and some don't, but the night me and my daddy ketched that twenty-two pound 'possum, I seen a ghost, and he was setting in a tree, and there ain't no denying it for a fact. If you want me to I'll tell you about it."

"There may be ghosts and there may not be," the old miller declared, "but if you say you saw one, then I'm ready to believe it, Lawton."

"Daggone it!" Lawton snorted, "them durn dogs is barking at the edge of that same field right now."

"Maybe that's the same 'possum," said Purefoy in a quiet voice.

"Or the same ghost," Lawton replied, and he turned and widened his eyes at the little colored boy who shook his head, shivered a bit and slid over closer to the fire.

"Anyway, they used to tell how it all got started, and after my experience out there one night it's the truth for me," Lawton declared. "And if you want to hear it, I'll tell it whilst we set here and get dried out, though I reckon everybody already knows the facts of the tale before I open my mouth."

We protested vehemently that we didn't. So he began.

"Well, you might know that a long time ago when the Yankees was fighting with us Southern folks, 'twas said old hell-fire Sherman and his soldiers marched through this Scotch country burning and destroying and seeking who-all they could layway and devour. Whe'r they did or not I dunno, but anyhow I'll tell you the tale and the facts of it as 'twas told to me—and then heel behind it with what happened to me and my daddy. Well, them soldiers come acrosst the Cape Fear River down the country there at Averysboro. You've

seen that old stage road too, ain't you, Mr. Mac—that used to run from the mountains to the sea?"

"Yes, I made a sort of map of the old King's High Road once and the canals round and about," the miller said.

"Yes sir, and it was that same road that they come along. And after they'd got over the river they fou't a battle down there. And you can see the graveyard where some of them that was killed—Yankees and Southern boys—lie buried to this day. I knowed a fellow once plowed up a skull in the field there with a bullet in it. He wore that bullet on a string around his neck to keep off the toothache—for years he done it till his teeth slam rotted out. Well, while these soldiers marched along they went all around into the highways and byways searching up provisions and vittles. It was Christmas time when they come up the road to Squair Barclay's grove—into that field out there. It was a lot bigger field in them days, and right where we're setting by this fire, with the hump of the furrow you can feel under these leaves, was rolling cotton land. And a power of slaves worked in it.

"Yes sir, the Squair was a big man and had a great big house in that grove and a winding drive running up to it as well as a winding staircase inside. My daddy said he'd seen the staircase when he was a boy. Made of mahogony wood it was and plumb purty. Well, the soldiers was 'specting a lot of good things out'n that mansion. Yes sir, they was gonna eat and sleep at the Squair's place. And finally old Squair come out and bowed stiff and with a shine in his eye says how sorry he was, gentlemen, we haven't got no room for you a-tall. They argued back and forth and maybe they was impressed by the old gentleman's manners. The story has come down how polite and genteel but bull-headed he was. Anyway, they say the officer man and his soldiers ended up by asking if they could petch their tents in the grove. Go right ahead, he said,

and do that. Of course I reckon they would have done it nohow, 'cause I've heard tell and everybody knows soldiers is a rough bunch of folks. But manners is manners, though in these days they ain't as much of 'em as they onct was, God knows.

"Now the Squair and his wife had a little boy, and he was much took with them soldiers and all the clanking swords, the rifles and the bayonets, and the goings on down in the grove. So when there weren't nobody looking he slipped out'n the house and went down there and kept brushing about and spying at everything and asking questions and telling 'em about what old Sandy Claus was gonna bring him that night. The Squair sent one of the slave women out to get him, and he hollered and bellered when she took him in the house. When supper time come the Squair treated all the soldiers mighty fine. He had his niggers bring out the beef and ham, and there was plenty of good wine and cider there to give the soldiers some of it. It has been handed on down, as I said, what a big liver and spread-feaster old Squair Barclay was. They said once he had such a big corn-shucking that he killed seven solid beef and a hundred and ten chickens. That was the night old Lem Hockaday gorged hisself and dropped dead in the frozen road on the way home. Well, that was the kind of feed the old Squair pulled off for them soldiers out in the grove."

"I've heard tell," the miller spoke up, as he took out his tin box of sweet flagroot and bit off a chew, "that when Sherman's bummers come through Little Bethel most of the people were about to starve to death." The old man sometimes was cantankerous and zealous in his historical accuracy.

"Course I don't know all the facts the way you do," Lawton answered somewhat sourly. "You don't want to hear this old story nohow," he suddenly broke off.

"Listen to them 'ere dogs, will you!" said Purefoy, who had been sitting on his haunches with his head cocked sideways.

"Hu-m-uh," Lawton mused. "Danged if they don't sound ezzactly like that night long time ago."

"Come on, what happened that night—let's hear the story," I said.

"Yes," said Mr. Mac, as he munched his sweet flag. "And come to think of it, Lawton, it must have been after the Yankees' visit that the people starved."

"Well, as I was saying," Lawton continued presently, "before King Solomon spoke and heshed me with his wisdom—them soldiers et and drunk and felt mighty fine, and they set around the camp fire in the grove all that night, whooping and singing and all-happy, the whole slew of them. I used to know some of the words of that song they said they sung. Yeah—

'There's grapeshot and musket and the cannon's rumble loud,
There's many a mangled body, a blanket for their shroud,
There's many a mangled body left on the field alone,
And I'm a poor soldier far from my home!' "

"Can't you sing it all?" I urged.

"No, not without my guitar. But it's mournful-like, all right, and every verse ends with being a soldier far from his home. I learnt it from old Mis' Dela Norton. So they sung and hollered and finally one of the soldiers poking about into the cellar got a whole barrel of wine out and they all drunk some more. Purty soon they were feeling real good except a few of them maybe with weak stomachs.

"Now the Squair and his wife had done gone to bed up in the big room. Maybe they were asleep, I dunno. Maybe they were waiting for the little boy to go to sleep so they could

put some Sandy Claus in his stocking, I dunno. Now the big Captain of the soldiers had done told the Squair he would see nothing was disturbed and they would take care of everything. I reckon after all the Yankees weren't so bad, though I've hearn my old man say hisself that some of 'em had horns and hoofs and a tail like the devil. Miss Betsy Gillis said she saw one with his shoes off onct and his feets were plumb forked and crotched like a hazel stick. And old Caroline McDiarmid, it was told, said she seen one with his breeches down back of her barn onct and he had a plumb sure enough tail like the devil hisself and swung it about brushing away the flies. That's what she got for her peeping."

The old miller let out a snort, gazing at the fire with half-closed eyes, his lips parted in a little teasing smile.

"Hah, hah, that's what they said. Well, that little boy he couldn't sleep for thinking about Sandy Claus and them soldiers in their blue coats and their swords and everything. And maybe the racket too sort of kept him awake. So he laid in his little bed listening to the happenings down in the grove. Finally when everybody else in the house was quiet he got up and crope out and went down there again. And there sot the soldiers all full of liquor and a-jawing with one another.—Quit listening to them dogs, Puref'y! They ain't going to tree nothing."

"Yessuh," said Purefoy humbly.

"In a minute or two it gets to the real sad part. And you can't help listening when a tale is sad—hard-hearted as ever any soul can be. Ain't it so, Mr. Mac?"

"It's so," Mr. Mac agreed gravely.

"Well, this 'ere little boy croped down there where the soldiers were. And by this time they were all drunk and some of 'em was cussing now and about to fight. When the boy come up to 'em they all stopped and looked at him, and one of 'em said, What the hell you doing out here this time of night?

Maybe he's a Rebel spy, another'n spoke up. Pshaw, he ain't nothing but a little boy! another said. Yeah, but you can't tell about 'em, the talk went on. They say these Rebels starts mighty young and they suck pizen in with their mammy's milk. Like as not he'd cut your throat with a razor he's got in that nightgown. And another'n said, Sonny you'd better be in bed. Let him set up, 'twon't hurt him, one the t'others said.

"Then they all got to asking questions and bragging on him and said, Your father's a big rich man, ain't he? He must have horses hid in the swamp, and plenty of silver and things buried deep in the ground. Favver might could have some horses and silver and all hid away—I wouldn't tell, the boy said. What's that, said the big Captain of a soldier who by this time was sizzling drunk with the rest of them. I wouldn't tell you, said the boy. Well, maybe he has, said the Captain, and was lying when he told us everything had been sent to the army—all the horses and money and everything. I ain't going to tell you, said the boy, and you better quit calling my favver a liar.

"Then they got to fooling with the boy, half-joking and half-serious like. You know how it is, sometimes big boys'll pick at little boys or grown men'll bother little helpless things, especially when they're sad and maybe long ways from home and sick at their heart like them soldiers maybe was and them drunk to boot. If you don't tell us we might hang you up, said one of the soldiers. We hung a old man down the road yestiddy to make him tell. His neck stretched out long as a gander's. Another minute and he'd been flapping his wings at the pearly gates. But he give in just in time. It was the big Captain talking like that now and he looked mighty mean. Yes sir, we might hang you up high as Haman, he said.

"Of course they didn't mean all that—they was just joking and picking at him. But he begun to cry, and you know how it is sometimes when anybody cries. It's liable to make you

meaner than you was, if you're set on pestering of 'em. And that's the way it was with them, they didn't give way to feeling sorry for him. Shut up, they said. And then they begun to give him some Minie balls and one of 'em give him a piece of new money with a picture on it, and he hushed his crying. Then they begun to come at him again in real dead earnest, asking him about all them horses and where that silver and money was buried, 'cause they had already got the idea from the way he was acting that that little boy knowed something. And he mought for all I know.

"Course they didn't mean no harm maybe, as I said, but they were getting drunk, good drunk by this time. And you know how it is when folks get drunk and a long ways from home—from their women folks at home—they are just as like as not to get powerful mean the way I said. And so they stood around him in a ring and kept sort of projecking at him and some of 'em now and then would h'ist up his little nightgown and laugh and try to pinch his little organ. And one or two of 'em begun to stick twigs and sticks at him. And there they was all around him, the way the wise men maybe ringed in the little Jesus child back in them olden days—where was it, Mr. Mac—Palusteen?"

"In Jerusalem, the Bible says. But maybe it was Palusteen," said the old miller.

"Jerusalem then, though it don't make no difference where. Finally the big Captain soldier said, By God, we'll hang the little rascal on that limb if he don't tell us the good news. And another said, By God, we will. But you know, that little fellow wouldn't tell 'em a word, nary 'un. He just stood there, the plumb tears pouring out'n his eyes and his little lips trembling. And one of the drunkest of the soldiers all of a sudden tied a hankcher around his little mouth so he couldn't squeal much. Lord I wish I had been off in the barn somewhere with a long deer rifle or up on a rooftop with it.

"There was that big 'simmon tree there in the grove with the limbs spread out and a little swing on it where that boy used to swing. Go there to the edge of the woods and you'll see it in the moonlight—the tree I mean—standing there right this minute, 'cepting of course it's much bigger now than it was in them days. And one of them soldiers took his sword and cut the rope in two. Then they tied the ends around the little boy under his armpits and hung him up. Now, they said, you gonna tell us about them horses and where the money's hid? And the little boy kept shaking his head. Golly, that little young'un was a stout Trojas man all right.

"Then they started swinging him back and forth, 'way here and 'way there, then higher and higher, till finally his head would almost touch the limbs of the red oaks beyond. And he couldn't make nary a sound 'cause they had his mouth covered up with that there hankcher and his hands tied. When he would swing by him, the big soldier would say, you gonna tell? and the little boy would shake his head, twisting about and the scalding tears gushing from his eyes. Then it was the big soldier got bull-mad and he shouted out so loud that he roused the Squair up in his great bed where he slept. The Squair must have missed the little boy at once, for they could hear him roaring in the house, and then a light sprung up through the window. You gonna tell me? I ask you for the last time! said the big soldier. And the little boy shook his head. And then as he swung back toward him that there soldier flew all to pieces in his mind, pulled out his swo'd and run it through the little boy's stomach and killed him—unh!"

For a moment Lawton was silent. Then he looked over at the miller. "What you think ought to be done with a man would kill a little boy like that?"

"I don't know," the miller answered, staring off into the night.

"He ought to be set in one of them 'ere electric chairs up at

Raleigh where they kill the niggers—that's what—and cooked till he's done."

Little Purefoy turned suddenly over in the straw and put his face on his arm. He made such a violent and abrupt movement that I noticed him. I put my hand comfortingly on his foot, as much as to say not to be frightened, for it was only a story after all. During the rest of the tale he lay still and made no sound.

"Well," Lawton went on, "the Squair and his wife had come out on the porch 'cause they had heard the shout. And they went rushing down toward the soldiers, the two of 'em in their white nightgowns, throwing up their hands and squealing and squalling. And when they seen the little boy hanging there by the firelight, his head bent over like Jesus on the cross and the blood drip-dropping from him to the ground, they both went hog-wild and run at the soldiers clawing and scratching like cats. And what you reckon happened? Nothing 'cepting the soldiers killed both of 'em. And the big soldier stood there drunk, swinging the little boy easy with one hand, all the time swinging him back and forth like a breeze moving the swing, and looking on at the massacre. And when the old Squair kicked his last kick and lay still like a hog dead in the slaughtering pen, the big soldier give the little boy's body such a swish that it flew high up and lodged in the fork of that 'simmon tree, rope and all.

"Then when they'd done so much damage, 'cause they were all so drunk,—killed the boy, the Squair and his wife, they set fire to the big house. And the niggers run out of their cabins into the fields, hollering and wailing while the house burned down. And the soldiers shot some of the niggers just to see 'em fall. They even shot two girls that had run and hid under the corncrib, leaving 'em lying under there like dead rats, same as the way the Scotch Whigs and Tories used to do each other in this valley, so 'tis said. Then they packed up their

stuff, saddled their horses and got away from there, drag-footed and quiet. And they nevermore didn't come back.

"Now ain't that a pitiful tale?" Lawton gulped when he had ended, and in his embarrassment he laid his forefinger alongside his nose and blew a fierce discharge toward the fire. His eyes were bright with the tears of his own emotion. We nodded agreement.

"Well, a day or so later they buried the dead folks there in the family graveyard, boy and all. And such a crowd! I've heard tell, I've heard tell!

"And as time passed the brambles and trees growed up over the graves and nobody went there no more. So that's how it was. Time and time later the white folks finally cleaned up that grove and they made a field of it. But they didn't touch that 'simmon tree, where the little boy had been murdered. No sir. And I don't blame 'em.

"Well, I don't hear them dogs no more. Maybe we'd better be moseying on." And he pushed a chunk toward the fire with his heel as if about to rise.

"But what about the ghost?" I asked.

"And the 'possum big as a calf?" the miller queried.

"I was coming to that," said Lawton, "though I thought as how maybe you'd forgot about it." And he grinned.

"Well, one night when I was about yearling size I went with my ol' man out coon hunting over on the hill there. And we had four dogs named Rang, Gouge, Spot and Bo-peep,—them two running out there tonight is named after some of 'em. And they were the best coon dogs that ever there was. Just as Spot and Bo-peep is about the best 'possum dogs there is—though as you might say, we ain't had no proof of it tonight. We hadn't been out hunting more'n a few minutes when we up and caught that big 'possum I told you about, and we weren't hunting for 'possums either. It's like I've heard

Mr. Mac say over at the mill—sometimes when you will you don't and when you won't you will. So we put the 'possum in the sack and went on after coons.

"In an hour or so we struck a hot track and the dogs run up and down the swamp, yow-yow-yow, as hard as life would do. Then out on the hills and back again they'd come. It kept up for a long time. There was something quare about it, 'cause a coon don't usually run like that. He sticks straight in the swamp and just runs the fire out'n whatever chases him. Then they struck a trail out of the swamp again—yow-yow-yow, up the hill, across the field toward where the old Barclay house had been. And all of a sudden the racket stopped. What do you reckon's happened now? I said. The old man said they must have ketched him. Then he said no, they couldn't a-ketched him, for a coon would go up a tree, and the dogs couldn't clamb the tree to get at him, so if we'd wait they'd speak again. And he hollered to 'em, You, Man, go on! But they didn't. For whilst we stood in the edge of the fields a-talking it over, here come the dogs creeping back and saying never a sound. And they got right clost up to us and whined and whimpered. That ain't no coon, said the old man. What is it? I said. It ain't no coon, he said.

"Now it's known that a hog may run for his life, but a dog runs for his chareckter. And our dogs had plenty of that. They was well trained, and when the old man spoke they knowed what to do. Everybody did, when he spoke. Get on there, Rang. Get on, Gouge, you Spot and you Bo-peep. And grabbing up a brush to frail 'em, he set 'em off again—yow-yow-yow. They run the trail on across the old field and toward where the old house had been and where that 'simmon tree stood up plain in the moonlight. Purty soon here they come back lickety-lick, lickety-lick, and croped up around the old man and me and hugged close to our legs, whimpering and a-whining again. It ain't no coon, bless God, I know it

now, the old man says. What is it? I says. You know what it is? he says. And I say I don't. And he says, It's a ha'nt—if what I heard is so—but I ain't never seen a ha'nt in my life, and maybe tonight's a good time to see one, he said. Of course he was half-joking-like for he didn't believe all the scary things he'd heard about the old Barclay place, and I didn't neither, little as I was. But I've believed 'em ever since.

"Now the old man he was scared of nothing dead or alive. Oh yes, he was mean, and I got scars under my britches to this day to prove it. So he says, We're going to see. Here, Rang, here Bo-peep! And we started out 'crost the fields. But you know them dogs wouldn't run nary another step. They come slipping behind, and every once in a while they'd let out a pitiful wheeah-wheeah fuss. The old man beat 'em with a stick, but they wouldn't budge a hair from behind us. Purty soon we come up to that old 'simmon tree, and there in the moonlight you could see something a-setting in the fork of it. Great God, something bigger'n a 'possum was a-setting in it. Bigger'n that big 'possum we already had in our sack he was.

"Well when we got clost to that tree the old man set the sack down. And he kept looking at whatever it was. There weren't no bears in that country then, not even no wolves, and I begun to feel funny. Come on, said the old man, and he went on up with me behind him, and Rang and Gouge and Spot and Bo-peep all in a row behind me—and everybody still as the inside of a coffin in a grave.

"Well, we come a little closer, and there, bless my Lord and wonder-working God, in that 'simmon tree shining in the moonlight was a little curly-headed boy."

"Naw, naw," the miller murmured, staring at him.

"Cross my heart to heaven, it was! There in the moonlight was a little boy with his yellow curls all hanging down and his little face pitiful and pale as death, like flour on it. And it was the Squair's little boy. And every now and then he'd

reach out his little hand and pull off a ripe 'simmon, eating it, and the dark seeds kept falling to the ground like great drops of blood, one after the other falling down.

"I stood there froze in my tracks, but the old man sure had a craw full of grit and he said he was going to clamb that 'simmon tree and get that little Barclay boy, and if he was flesh and blood he'd take him home and raise him. I begged him not to try it 'cause I'd heard tales about Plat-Eye, and old Jack Muh Lantern and the Iron-faced Man, and how they'd put a spell on you from which you'd never wake. But he shinned on up that 'simmon tree and got right close to where that boy was sitting. And then the little fellow run out along the limb to the clean tip of it and hung there by one claw hand like a 'possum. And the old man shook the limb so hard that the little fellow fell off tumbling down to the ground.

"But he hit the dirt running, and away he went as hard as his little legs would carry him toward the graveyard back of where the old house had been. We could see him clear as day as he run, and all of a suddent he went out of sight into a hole in one of them graves. But the dogs didn't go after him, no sir. They whined and whimpered and stuck close to me. And when the old man come down out of the tree he was white as a sheet and shaking like a frosted fern plant. What's the matter, I said. Come on, he said, let's fan it. And both of us and the dogs lit a rag getting away from there. Yessir, it was legs take body away, and stay gone. And we forgot all about that 'possum in the sack. I reckon he gnawed his way out and high-tailed it like us. And later when we had hit the old stage road out there and easier going, the old man said that little boy had breathed his breath in his face and it was icy cold and stunk with the purges of death.

"And other people got so that they seen him in that 'simmon tree too, and finally nobody would go around that place at

all. The brier bushes growed up about the tree and over the graveyard again, and the whole place was full of sassafras scrubs. And you can go out there now and look at it—a plumb forest of pines, sweet gums and dogwoods. And there'll never more be a plow stuck in it till the Judgment Day."

For a moment we were all silent, then Lawton rose, stretched himself and yawned. "And the dogs have quit running," he said. "Maybe they've seen that ha'nt and have gone hell-bent for home. We got to go too. Come on, Puref'y," he called, "and quit that whimpering." Little Purefoy jumped up, his shoulders shaking. He had been crying, and he kept his face turned from us ashamed.

Later when we had left Lawton and Purefoy at the bootlegger's shack and were driving home, the miller said, "Lawton never had a chance to weigh that 'possum, now did he? How could he know it weighed twenty-two pounds?"

"That's right," I said.

"I told you he was an outdacious liar. Still, it was a good story."

"And poor little Purefoy—it really frightened him."

"I doubt he was crying over the story," said the miller. "It was the talk about the electric chair done it. Remember how the boy turnt over and laid his face in the straw at the mention of it, and said never another word?"

"Yes."

"Poor fellow. He's got no home of his own. Lawton lets him sleep in the old tumbledown barn on a bed of shucks. He works and gets his board and keep and maybe a quarter now and then when his master feels in the humor to give him one."

By this time we had reached Mr. Mac's milldam, the moon had gone down, and the nebulous light of the stars illuminated the night with a vague and misty radiance. A shine was on the pond, and the shingled mossy millhouse roof glistened as

if with a dewy hoarfrost. For a moment the old miller stood in front of his door looking up at the sky, his grizzled weather-beaten face touched with a gentle melancholy.

"We older folks don't know the hearts of young people much," he murmured as if to himself. "You remember Metzanteen Watson, the Negro tenant farmer that killed his landlord?—Course you been gone from this neighborhood so long."

"Yes, I remember him."

"He was electrocuted in Raleigh last Friday."

"I know. I wrote the governor pleading for him."

"I did too, but it done no good. Well, Purefoy wasn't crying about the ghost of that little boy. No. He was crying about that electrocution. Metzanteen was his father."

"Oh," I said.

"And it's all too bad," said the miller. "Well, good night."

As I rode on back to the University I kept thinking—not of the ghost of that little boy in the tree nor of homeless Purefoy back there, but of another little boy with whom I had once climbed trees on my father's farm, played fox and the goose and studied the stars at night even—a boy with a joyous whistle in the fields at dawn and with his wide-breaking laugh in the furrow at evening time, Metzanteen Watson—and all ever before evil was.

And I looked up through the windshield at the vast night sky ahead, with its gossamer scarf of the milky way flung across it. And it was the same as always from everlasting to everlasting, graceful, careless and serene as when he and I had looked at it together and wondered.

To Make A Garland

IT WAS THE WEEK END AND I HAD COME DOWN from the University to go with the old miller of Harnett out for a historical proguing trip in the Cape Fear River Valley. Our first stopping place was to be the site of the ancient and lost town of Choeffington.

As we came around the bend of the road down near Averysboro we met a Negro funeral procession. In front was a one-horse wagon, pulled along by a raw-bony old mule, and an old Negro man and woman were on the seat, the man driving. In the wagon was a coffin with a simple garland of wild flowers lying on it. Two or three wobble-wheeled buggies followed, and after them came a dozen or more Negroes walking, young and old and dressed in their loud and flashy Sunday garb. I pulled my Ford off to the side of the road to let the procession pass. The miller took off his hat respectfully, and so did I. And as the wagon went by, he spoke to the two old Negroes.

"Morning, Simey—morning, Leony," he said.

The two colored people lifted their gnarled and mask-like faces, and the old man tipped his rusty hat.

"That's Simey and Leony Lucas," said the miller as we drove on.

"Must be some of their people dead," I said.

"Aye," he said. Then he shook his head and finally added, "But we've all got to come to it—that we have. But maybe we won't in such a sad way as that."

I was hopeful now that one of the old man's stories might be forthcoming.

"What made it so sad, Mr. Mac?" I presently inquired.

"If you won't drive so danged fast, I might tell you," he said. I slowed down, and he went on. "Take a man who has lived his three score and ten years," he said. "He goes out walking in the woods, say, enjoying the spring weather and the singing of the birds. A tall big white oak is in the woods. For generations one of its great limbs has been rotting off, and for some generations the old man himself has been living. At the very spang second he walks under the tree, the limb falls off and cracks his skull. The two things meet. Except in this case, you might say three things met, rather circumstances—a 'possum hunting, a courting, and a harmless ride. They all conjoined as the almanac says of signs in the firmament, and woe and sorrow was the result."

We rode along awhile in silence. "What were the three circumstances, Mr. Mac?" I asked.

He thought a moment. "People then maybe, more than circumstances, and it was all years ago," he said. "First you might say there was Otis Ochiltree and his boy Charlie. They were good-hearted, honest Negroes, bothering nobody, making their crops, paying their debts and saving toward the day they could buy a little house and piece of land of their own. It was a rare thing indeed for Otis or his boy Charlie ever to take a day off from work. When other tenant farmers, black and white, were sitting around the country store or filling station, Otis and his boy were out cleaning up the hedge-

rows, cutting their cotton stalks, digging stumps and getting ready for the next crop.

"Now and then in the fall they'd take a little time off to go 'possum hunting at night. They didn't go often because they were too hardworking for that. But Otis dearly loved the sport and so did Charlie. That was about the only outside fun they had. They kept a couple of smart hounds for that purpose and it was the custom with Otis every Christmas to have good roasted 'possum on his table. He would catch 'possums in the fall, pen 'em up and fatten 'em on 'simmons, grapes, boiled potatoes and all such mess. And at Christmas he'd invite his friends in.

"I mention the 'possum hunting here because it's important —much like that man walking under the white oak tree I spoke of.

"And then there was another person mixed up in the bloodthirsty events. Little Katie Cameron. She was the daughter of old Dekayser Cameron over on Hector's Creek, and the jewel and beauty of the entire neighborhood. She was a little spitfire too as you will later on see.

"Then there was Elmer Belden. He was the ringleader. Elmer was about six feet high and nimble as a deer. And he had a kind of round smiling face and black hair which he kept shampooed and parted in the middle, and a pair of eyes that flashed black—even as his teeth flashed white below them. Yes sir, he was one of the dashingest young bucks in the whole neighborhood. And he had a temper, fiery and hot as powder aflame. And he was wild-jealous over little Katie Cameron.

"So these were the foremost ones in this tragedy of blood and death."

The old miller then told me the story—with a sprinkling of his own fancy as to details and imaginings. The facts though, speak for themselves.

"Well, one November night this Elmer Belden stood in front of his mother's mirror dressing up to go calling on his little sweetheart Katie Cameron. And while he stood there admiring himself and tying his tie, in come Mrs. Belden and queried if he'd milked the cow. Now there's nothing wrong in a mother asking her son to milk the cow, is there? But Elmer, as I say, had the terriblest temper a man ever was afflicted with. He was plumb spoiled, that's what. So he blared out at his mother and said he weren't going to milk any cow. He was late getting back from the cotton market and he didn't have time, he said. Let Ted do it. Ted was the younger brother and as smart as knitting needles.

" 'But Ted's weighing up cotton in the fields and won't be back till 'way late,' said the patient mother.

" 'Well, he can milk when he does come!' Elmer shouted. With that he tore out of the house like the dogs were after him. Poor Mrs. Belden stood and looked worryingly after him. Elmer was the darling of her heart and most anything he'd do she'd forgive him. But oh, she worried over him. And the main reason she worried was because as everybody knew Elmer was unregenerate. She was a sturdy member in the church and so was her crippled husband, Duncan, and also little Ted who took up the collection. But nobody had ever been able to get Elmer to stick inside the fold. He had professed religion once when he was about ten. But when he was sixteen and started flying around the girls, he got drunk at a school-breaking and took it all back. And from then on he was known as a hardened sinner, though now and then he attended church just to hear Katie Cameron sing.

"And as she stood and watched him climb into his Ford car out in the grove, Mrs. Belden was thinking, no doubt—suppose sometime that crazy car should run off the milldam and drown Elmer, then Lord a-mercy what would happen to his

poor soul? It would burn in everlasting hell-fire forever in yonder hereafter.

"And so the worm of worry and grief had kept eating in her heart and had paled her cheek morning, noon and night till she was complected like the color of sycamore wood.

"But Elmer didn't worry about his soul as he drove on out into the highway. Not a bit in this world. He was thinking of Katie Cameron and her bright eyes and how she and he would swing 'crost the river and get some barbecue and ride around in the soft night. Her warm body would be snuggled up close to his and one of his arms would hold her swelling bosom tight against him as he whirred on under the stars. So he considered. And he hauled off and sang a dash or two of song for her, a song she loved, saying—

'O Katie fair beyond compare,
I'll make a garland of thy hair
Shall bind my heart forever mair
    Until the day I die—'

thus putting in 'Katie' for the name 'Helen' in the ancient old-time ballad. But the best laid plans, you know—as our sweet bardie says—they aften gang a-gley. And as for making a garland of her hair, you might rather say he made a noose for somebody else.

"Well, that Katie Cameron had a mind and a will of her own, and sometimes they wouldn't fit to the bend of Elmer's purpose and his arm. Yessir, she was a colt in her own right. And however handsome and dashing Elmer might be, she seemed to welcome the company of Gordon Overby too. Some women want to try to drive two horses when they can't even handle one. She was like that. Now Elmer and Gordon were as different from each other as back is front. Where Elmer was fiery and full of temper, Gordon was a quiet say-nothing

fellow, and everybody liked him. For a long time he was one of the best baseball pitchers in the whole valley, with an arm like a whip, as all can testify who'd seen him mow the batters down over there in the ball park summer after summer.

"But Elmer wasn't worried about Gordon either, not tonight he wasn't. For during the week he had got a sweet little letter from Katie in which she said how sorry she was they had had a quarrel on the Sunday before and how she hoped he'd drive over Saturday night. That meant a-plenty, coming from the sprightly jouncing girl who was as proud as she was pretty.

"So tonight was Saturday and he was on his way. And tonight, please good goddle-mighty, he'd pop the question full in her face and take her where she stood. And it wouldn't be long and Summerville church would be all decorated up with holly and mistletoe for a wedding.

"Now down at the crossroads about a mile an old fellow by the name of Ezra Banks had a filling station, and Elmer drew up there for a supply of gas. He'd need plenty of it tonight, for no telling where he'd drive to. He felt in the mood, and he hummed his tune over as he rolled up with the flourish of Wash Burns the drummer man.

" 'Howdy, Elmer,' the old man called as he took down the gas hose.

" 'Fill her up!' said Elmer as he hopped out, and pulled a roll of bills from his pocket. He had sold a bale of his daddy's cotton that afternoon at a good price, and he hadn't yet handed over the money. But that didn't worry him. He'd hand it over later—what was left of it.

" 'How's the car standing up?' old Ezra inquired with a wink and a chuckle which Elmer didn't like.

" 'Fine, fine.' Let the old fool make fun of him if he wanted to.

"Some time before, on his twenty-first birthday, Elmer's father had given him a little piece of land to be used for

his education up at the University. And he'd whopped right off and traded it for this same automobile. One year at college was enough for Elmer. His mind wasn't on learning. Foolish, of course. And now old man Banks must continue his little bit of teasing. He did so by blasting the light out of Elmer's sky. Gordon Overby had gone by with his horse and buggy a few minutes ago, he said, and who was sitting on the seat beside him—who but little Katie Cameron? Elmer stood still, looking out before him, his folding money crinkling in his hand. Then the fires of his temper began to burn and he got pale with the white-heat hate that rose in him. He on his way to see his darling—invited too—and she out with another man! Ah God!

"He whirled around, cranked his car, jumped in and tore up the gravel going away from there. Old Ezra shouted out at him he hadn't paid for the gas, but only a cloud of dust choked him with its answer.

"As Elmer whoomed along the road, jealousy and rage kept eating in his vitals like quicklime, and he began to think of some way to get back at Katie. Now Elmer's daddy had been a vengeful fire-eater before him and was blown up once by a sawmill boiler because he was trying to make a boiler do more than a boiler could. That's how he got crippled and bent over for life and turned to being a quiet-speaking Christian. And Elmer had his daddy's same spirit in him except many times more so.

"He was just driving wild now. Yes, he'd take a turn down by old Bluff Church, and Godwin, and back in toward Manchester and home. And he wouldn't go to Katie's house tonight—not for a pocketful of jews'-harps trimmed in gold. Like as not he might wind up with one of them bad women down there in Fayetteville. He knew one from hearing the fellows talk. Imogene was her name, and they said she was the purtiest strumpet loose out of hell.

"As he roared around the bend in the road near Dry Creek swamp where Otis Ochiltree lived, one of Otis' old sows and her six pigs ran across the road in front of him. But Elmer didn't slow up, not a bit, no sir. He would really spatter him a mess of pork this time. He blazed straight ahead at the brood, but they all made a wild scramble and got away except the last little pig, and he hit it spang in the middle. The next thing he knew his car was bouncing out of the road and stuck in the sandy ditch, and the pig was giving a few last bleeding jerks behind him.

"Elmer sat there awhile, burning mad. But his mind wasn't on the pig or the road. He could still get out of the ditch maybe when he wanted to, but Katie and Gordon Overby were afire in his brain. He could see both of them sitting up in the parlor, laughing and talking right that minute, no doubt. And Katie would be playing the organ for Gordon or maybe stroking her little new guitar and singing a ballad or religious song. Hell, suppose she did write that letter saying she was sorry. The facts proved that it was still a blind to keep him jiggling on a string or she wouldn't have been out with Gordon so soon after. No sir, he wouldn't be that big a fool—to show up at her house there and with Gordon waiting to give him the horselaugh. No sir. And he would fix that girl, somehow he would.

"But if Elmer could have seen what was happening at Katie's house he would have felt differently. I tell it as it must have been. At the very moment he was sitting in the ditch cussing her to purgatory and back, she was standing in front of the mirror dressing up special for him. The Summerville Tigers, for a rarity, had been defeated by the smart Dunston Red Birds in their off-season game that day, and Gordon had been dull and silent as dishwater all the way home. And besides she'd only gone with him to the game just to pass

the time till Elmer would be coming in the evening. So as soon as Gordon had helped her out at her front gate she made an excuse, and he drove away. And she was glad he was gone. That was one thing about Elmer—never a boring moment, not even in the two years they had been going together. But oh, he was so wild and wasteful. He was so wasteful and so wild!

"Here again it was that queer business of inheritance maybe. Old man Dekayser Cameron, Katie's father, kept a corn mill there on Hector's Creek and did a little bit of farming. And he must have been a crafty sort of fellow too to have the nice house he did and be able to take such good care of his family. Not that I'd suggest he ever cheated a customer, or that his piggin ever went into a bag twice where it ought to go only once. He was a good manager, that's all. And Katie had been trained to have an eye out for that. And though she was light-hearted as a lark, and a lively pretty thing as I've said, still she had horse sense. That explains why she kept Gordon hanging around. The sensible part of her nature declared for Gordon. But another part of herself was all for Elmer.

"And when the air was heavy with summer scents and a whippoorwill sang in the land and the yellow haze of the moon gleamed out of the dark smeary blue sky, she wanted Elmer no doubt, wanted the sound of his fresh voice, the sight of his proud face and flashing eye. Or when it was autumn and the fields lay brown and quiet and the western evening was full and red like a ripe-seeded cold watermelon, her heart ached thinking of Elmer. And on this particular evening as she saw herself in the mirror she'd just about made up her mind to make the jump. Yes, tonight she wouldn't be standoffish, and maybe she would say yes to him.

"Now, she was all dressed and fixed and the last touch of Fayetteville cologne had been added. And she was pretty, she

was, prettier than ever tonight—that ribbon in her hair, and the yellow dress, and the fishnet lace over her soft bosom.

"Well, it was time to hear his car around the bend. And that car—that was another thing. Of course it was foolish, and Gordon would never have bought such a thing. But when she and Elmer were married she'd take care of such foolishness. And lifting her guitar from the corner, she went out and sat on the porch and played the song Elmer often came to church to hear her sing. He had a melancholic streak beneath his gaiety and fire and he liked that song. It was named 'The Lone Pilgrim,' and began—

> 'I came to the place where the lone pilgrim lay
>   And pensively stood by the tomb,
> When in a low whisper I heard something say
>   How sweetly I sleep here alone!'

The moments passed, but no sound of the car came to her listening ears.

"There was nothing to do but wait. She could hear her pa and ma moving around in the kitchen, and there was a step in the hall. But it was only her younger brother Malcolm bringing in an armful of wood.

" 'Thought maybe you and your beau would like a good fire,' he jeered, 'seeing as how it might turn cold later and maybe a sharp frost be falling out of the sky and you ought to be inside.'

" 'Thank you, Malcolm, we will,' she murmured in polite keeping with the clothes she had on. And she soon went into the parlor where he already had a good fire going, though the weather was still in the middle of a mild spell.

" 'Which one you like better tonight, Sis?' Malcolm joked, 'Gordon or Elmer?'

" 'Wouldn't you like to know?' she answered snappishly as

she sat down by the fire and recklessly began to play chords to a favorite country dance tune known as 'Money Musk.'

" 'I reckon Elmer'll win out yet, won't he, Sis?'

" 'He might and he might not,' she replied loftily above the thrumming.

" 'Well, if it was me, I'd bet on Gordon.'

" 'I know you would,' she answered coldly.

" 'Because Elmer Belden's the kind of fellow who would beat his wife.'

" 'Yes, you know a lot,' and she made the guitar's E-string whing.

" 'Well, I know a fellow that'll cut the harness off other people's horses at church in the night the way he did Gordon's once'll do anything. Pa says so too.'

" 'Yes, and you and Pa don't know that Elmer did that, do you?' she said, hot as embers.

" 'Well, it was done and nobody in the neighborhood's mean enough to do it but him. Say, look at that clock. Maybe he's gone and kicked you.'

" 'You tend to your business and I'll tend to mine.'

" 'Yeh, and you better not let Ma hear you playing that there evil music!' he snorted as he went out, slamming the door behind him.

"Katie kept sitting there, playing and looking at the fire. And she waited and she waited, but Elmer didn't come. And along about ten o'clock when she'd gone to the door a dozen times and listened, she went in and flung herself down on the bed and cried her heart out. And her mother came in and tried to pet her up and said, 'What in the world's the matter? What in the world's the matter, child?' just the way mothers do. And just the way daughters do, Katie didn't tell her a thing. But that night before she went to sleep she swore a hurt and sobbing oath to her hot pillow that from this time forth Elmer Belden would find her nothing but a piece of ice.

"Now here is where poor Otis Ochiltree and his boy Charlie come into the tale, as it showed through later. It was their custom to go 'possum hunting, when they did go, on Saturday night if the weather allowed. And the weather on this particular night was perfect—a little damp and a mite warmish for November. So as soon as they'd finished their supper of cornbread, side meat and beans the loving Ada had fixed for them, they got out the lantern, called old Budge and Razzle and set off down the road. Near the creek they would turn off into the woods that led toward the river. Just before they got to the creek they saw a car stalled in the ditch with one wheel jacked up. Already the dogs had sniffed the air and dived off into the woods ahead of them. 'Whose car is that stuck in the ditch?' said Otis. 'Looks like Mr. Elmer Belden's at a distance.'

" 'Yes, that's Elmer's all right,' says Charlie, who was getting up into manhood now and called young white men by their first name when he felt he was at safe distance to do so. 'Reckon Elmer's had a puntcher and gone off to git help.'

" 'You mean Mister Elmer,' said Otis. That was one thing Otis had always tried to do—train up his boy right. 'I keep telling you, boy,' he said. 'Better put a handle to a white man's name. It pays to be polite behind backs like in front of 'em.'

" 'Yeh,' Charlie mumbled. 'Listen there, I believe old Razzle done struck something.' And forgetting the car, they hopped across the ditch and went on out of sight into the swamp. Through reeds and briers they slushed ahead. The dogs struck several different trails without treeing anything, and then finally an hour later they did tree, up a great poplar growing on the bank of the river.

" 'Bet that's a big 'possum this time,' said Charlie.

" 'Huh,' said Otis, 'don't you know big 'possums climb

little trees and little 'possums climb big trees, just like folks try to do? Where you been all the time in yo' life?'

" 'Well, I say cut it down,' said Charlie. And so they set to work. The dogs lay around in the leaves and whined and waited. It was near daybreak before the tree fell with a great tearing heartbreaking crash that sent the birds twittering and flying up out of the reedy brake and the owls chattering and hooting and hallooing frantic from the darkness around. The dogs jumped forward, ran down the great body of the tree and plunged into the top, Otis and Charlie with them. And in a moment Otis came stepping out, sure enough carrying a kitten 'possum in his hand about the size of a rat.

" 'What did I tell you?' he said disgustedly, and he started to throw the little critter into the reeds. But Charlie wanted to take it home and fatten it anyway.

" ' 'Fore spring it'll be big enough to eat,' he said. As he put it into the sack he got it too near one of the dogs who snipped at it and hurt it. Then they turned back the way they came. And when Charlie found the wounded 'possum dripping blood through the sack, he gave the animal to the dogs and followed after his father. And that was just where he missed it, putting that 'possum in the sack. You wouldn't think that a man's life would turn on such a little thing, now would you? But that's the way it often happens. Yessir, a gesture or an ill-spoken word can set off a firing squad or break a heart.

"Well, they got back home about daybreak and went to bed to sleep, not dreaming of how they would be waked up. And that was the last night's sweet sleep they had for many a day—forever maybe—either they or Ada.

"Next morning old Ezra Banks, who was one of the religious brethren in the neighborhood as well as a gossip, was on his way early to church. He usually got there ahead of the congregation, for it was his duty to see that the church was swept out and a fire lighted in the stove on a chilly morning.

So he was the first white man to come smack on Elmer's car stuck there in the ditch with the wheel propped up. And lo and behold, what else did he find? A bloody and battered tire pump was lying by the wheel and the sand around had been all trampled down. He looked at the scene awhile with his forehead wrinkled up. Then he saw clear what had happened. He set off up the road as fast as his old legs could carry him to a neighbor's house and told them that something terrible had happened to Elmer Belden. And in a little while the news spread round and about, and a crowd gathered by the car.

" 'Yessir, there's no doubt of it,' said old Ezra, pointing, 'foulish play has happened. See that there bloody pump. It's two and two make four even to a blind man.'

" 'You may be right and again you may be wrong,' said old Henry Link judiciously. 'It looks like turpitude, and yet—'

" 'Yet nothing,' said Lammy O'Quinn, the newly-elected J. P. 'Elmer must have been a-pumping up his tire—and somebody come up behind him and hein—heinously attacked him.' Lammy's legal authority just about certified the matter.

"And by this time, Duncan Belden, Elmer's crippled father, had arrived. Elmer had not been home the whole night. Yes, that was his car all right. John Marsden, the deputy sheriff, also came and eyed the situation, and soon discovered tracks passing along the sandy road and turning off into the woods.

"In a few hours the whole neighborhood was in a fever of excitement over the brutal murder of Elmer Belden. And the evidence of tracks soon led to Otis Ochiltree's house. Bang, bang, bang went the law on the door of the poor Negro's house. Ada came shivering out on the porch with popping eyes.

" 'What's the trouble? What's the trouble?' she kept saying.

"And the officers pushed their way in, waked Charlie and his father from their deep sleep, pulled them forth and began firing questions at them. Then they discovered the bloody sack

lying under the house where Charlie had thrown it. 'Yeh, he tried to hide it,' said deputy Marsden, feeling the handle of his gun.

" 'There—there—my innocent boy's blood!' groaned Duncan.

"Of course Otis and Charlie pleaded and argued as well as they could, and said they'd been 'possum hunting, and tried to explain things. 'And where is the 'possum?' the deputy shouted. And so with Ada weeping and hanging onto the deputy's coat-tail across the yard, they carried Otis and Charlie off to jail. And there they kept them.

"Where was the body? That was the question. By late sundown everybody knew that poor Elmer's mutilated corpse must be lying at the bottom of the river, and robbery was the motive for the crime. Duncan had told how Elmer had the money from the cotton sale in his pocket, and old Ezra deposed he had seen it when Elmer stopped for gas. That night lanterns winked like great lightning bugs along the river, and all through the next day the farmers went about in boats, dragging with grappling well-hooks, but catching nothing. And still another night and day the search continued.

"Elmer must have been carried over McAllister Falls and lodged twenty feet below in one of the suck holes under the rocks, they said, there along with the old Butree tombstones. And so they concentrated their efforts on diving. And such a splurge of people gathered around the Falls that little Ikey Truelove came out from the village with popcorn, peanuts and cold drinks and did a thriving business among the people.

"By this time the feeling in the neighborhood had got to a fever hot pitch. A barking, yelping mass of boys and young men gathered at the jail in Summerville. And only by the bravery of Sheriff McLeod and Deputy Marsden and several special deputies was the jail defended and the would-be mobsters dispersed. The grand jury met and quickly found a true

bill and the Negroes were held for trial without bail. At first-Monday court their trial for murder began. Hopping June Harris, who had recently got his license to practice law through a correspondence course, was appointed by the judge to appear for the defendants. He came to the cell and visited Otis and Charlie.

" 'You better compromise, Otis,' said Hopping June, 'and confess your bloody crime. We'll beg for mercy.'

" 'What in the world!' Otis moaned. 'What in the world's happened!' And Charlie sat in the back of the cell, his head bent down, his fists held up in front of him, crying and beating his elbows on his knees.

"Well, the trial went on, and still no sign of Elmer's body. But the evidence was clear, and so the justice of the good and fair commonwealth was meted out to hollow-eyed Otis in the term of twenty years in the penitentiary at hard labor. And Charlie being a minor, got two years on the fearful county chain-gang. The only thing that saved them from the electric chair was the absence of the body. But neither judge, lawyer nor jury could ever make them tell where they'd hidden it, nor what they had done with the money. So the dragging of the river was finally given up and the grappling well-hooks of the farmers returned to their places.

"But Otis never served his time. The night before they were to come to take him to the big iron pen in Raleigh, he hanged himself in his cell with his belt. He'd lost his faith and hope in justice and the world.

"The days went by, and the weeks slid on. And not a sign, not a glimmer of Elmer Belden's corpse was found.

"As the months passed, Mrs. Belden's hair grew whiter and her face more careworn and haunted. The thing that weighed hardest on her and woke her in dreadful dreaming at night was that Elmer had gone to meet his Maker unprepared. And when the autumn freshets and the winter snows came down and

washed the phlegm of the river's gullet out to sea, all hope of ever finding her son's broken form faded away. And as for Katie Cameron, she went about the neighborhood like a widow. She wore black to church and seemed caught away in a purified frozen distance from all the world.

"'Ah, she loved Elmer better than any of us dreamed,' Sister Nettie Carlson would murmur, staring across the aisle at her pale, lily-white face.

"'She did that,' tenderhearted Mavourneen Ennis would whisper. 'She's now wedded fast to the dead.' And poor Gordon Overby came and hung around her, but to no purpose—for a while at least. But bleeding hearts stop bleeding at last and leafless trees grow green again, as it says in the old ballad of the hawthorn tree. And that's the way 'twas all intended, or else grief would destroy the world. So in time Gordon persuaded her to go with him to a picnic at Murchison's mill. After that he was seen at her house more and more often, and when the spring came around Katie seemed her old self again and at church in a bright new dress and singing as sweetly as ever. On Memorial Day, when the bay blossoms shone and bees were humming in the beds of balm, she and Gordon were married and went to live on his little farm.

"One day in early autumn, young Ike Truelove was crying the county paper on the corner of the street in Summerville when a car of a southbound salesman stopped and let out a young man dressed in a nice blue suit, straw hat and red flowing necktie. Young Ike stared at him with popping eyes, and as the car drove off and the young man turned toward him, he whirled and dashed up the street and fell in at the front door of Sheriff McLeod's hardware store. 'He's back. He's riz from the dead!' he spluttered, 'with a new suit on!' And Elmer walked along the street swinging his suitcase, a little ashamed, as anyone could see, but still the same old jaunty Elmer. The

people poured out of the stores and buildings to look at him, and he spoke to this and that one as he passed.

" 'How you, Mr. Jamie? Good evening, Miss Atkins. Nice to be back again. And you, Mr. Berwanger, how you come on!' And they all looked back at him with open mouths saying never a word, wondering down to their shoe soles.

"He went on up to the garage, and in a moment or two Milton Morris' hired car drove him out of town toward home. Next day the news was told fast and furious how Elmer had been away to Ohio or somewhere, working in an automobile factory and hadn't been dead at all. And he was surprised as the next one when he heard about the turmoil occasioned by his disappearance and the sorrowful fate that had fallen on poor Otis Ochiltree. It had all been a joke he played by putting pig's blood on the tire pump to make Katie wonder and mourn after him some.

"For a long while after that Elmer stayed quietly at home, farming and going nowhere. And in the August meeting, to his mother's weepful joy, he professed religion, joined the church, and started living a new life. But the price he paid was the loss of Katie forevermore.

"Of course they let Charlie loose from the chain-gang and in a hurry, but it came too late for Ada. Her mind had already broke slam to flinders from grieving. And on windy days she would go hollering in the fields and calling for Otis. So they had to shut her away in the asylum. Twenty years ago that was. She died there this week, and it was her in the coffin we just passed.

"And that's what circumstances can do for you," said the old miller soberly when he had ended the story, "if they get all crossed up."

"And they get crossed up here in the South more than they ought to, don't they?" I said with some feeling.

"They do for a fact," he replied. "Well, we're getting into old Choeffington now. . . ."

"Where?" and I looked around.

"This wide field we're coming to," he said. "The town once stood in about the middle of it. It was burnt and destroyed in the war. Stop and we'll start looking for brickbats."

Whistle and I'll Come to You

ON ONE OF THOSE WIDE AND SOUNDLESS days which sometimes befall our section of the world in late March, two hired men were squatting to their work in the corner of Squire Johnson's big field. Old Tapley Jones and a pale-faced youth named Archie Beasley were putting down the yearly bedding of sweet potatoes. With the slow and certain movements of souls who long ago had learned the folly of hurry in an unresponsive universe, they bent back and forth and up and down, pushing yams and white "perbatuses" into the mellow mealy ground. Since early morning the two had been at their task with scarcely a word between them, though now and then old Tapley would be stirred to a smothered grunt of ejaculation over the sudden remembrance of something past or the prospect of things to come, or let loose one of his bits of ancient folk wisdom. There they were, alone in that vast vacuity of fields and sky.

Near noon a tiny whirlwind rose up in the fields and danced its foolish, giddy way across the plowed land. The whirl of smoky dust attracted Tapley's attention and finally stimulated him to speech.

"Gonna keep dry, Archie," he said, letting his eye travel from the whirlwind to the far-off line of trees in the swamp a mile away. Archie started violently and plunged his potato sharply into the ground. He too looked off toward the cloud of dust now growing and ascending with a few ragged leaves and wisps of grass into heaven.

"Hee-hee—yeh," he said hastily, "yeh, dry."

Old Tapley creaked to his feet and stretched himself, raising his lumpy arms above his head. "The Squair won't be forrud with his stuff this year like usual, Archie," he said. "Will he, Archie?" He would talk now after so long a silence.

"No, no, he won't," the youth answered haltingly in his cracked, reedy voice. "We do need a season—need rain bad, too dry for planting." He relieved himself of a charge of tobacco juice accumulated in his jaw, pushed his potato home, and reached for another.

Tapley turned himself about and for a moment stood gazing contemplatively toward the southern horizon. It was from over there that his people had first heard the muffled sounds of combustion and war, bugles and guns and marching men, and in a burst of emotion had sent their sons away on a failing and wasteful destiny. "Aih me!" he sighed, thinking of such days. There were so many who never came back—not from this war, nor from any of the others, whether the Spanish-American War, the Civil War, the War of 1812, or the Revolution—all of which had drawn their grisly suck and sustenance from the bright and eager living ones hereabouts. "Aih," he said again.

The lone figure of a bent old woman turned from the highroad into the lane that led by the Squire's house. Old Tapley stared at her intently as he dropped to work on his knees.

"It's quare business," he said aloud, and he lifted his eyes again to the approaching woman.

"Yeh, yeh, farming is oncertain," Archie agreed.

Tapley looked at his partner's ragged-haired bowed head. "I don't mean farming, Archie."

"No, no—hee-hee, course not," Archie mumbled nervously.

The old man began to blow his breath through his teeth and weave his shoulders from side to side, a way he had when he was absorbed in thought. Presently he burst out, "Do you believe in the Resurrection, Archie?"

"I—I dunno," the boy choked, eyeing him.

"I mean do you believe the dead's gonna rise ag'in—gonna bust through their graves and stand up all in white when Gab'el blows his horn—the way poor Mis' Graham believes her pitiful family will."

"I hearn the preachers say they would, I dunno nothing 'bout it myself. The preachers say they will."

"All them there boys what went off to the war and was killed. I looked at some was fetched back—all rotten away. The Squair's own darling son Frank was one of 'em. Anybody'd rot in the ground 'fore long, you know. Where you reckon their sperit is, Archie?"

Archie thought a long while and then answered gravely, "Pa says ef they did fight, no doubt they gone straight to heaven. They fou't on our side."

"Then if they're in heaven, how their body gonna rise here on the last day? Scripture says body and soul waits sleeping in the ground."

"Hee-hee—search me." And Archie reached nervously around for more potatoes.

Tapley looked up and spoke to the woman passing in the lane near by. The bent creature stared out from under her slat bonnet with great gaunt eyes and passed on, making no sign that she had heard his greeting.

"Aih, poor thing," he sighed again, gazing after her. Then he abruptly held up a huge yam and smoothed the dirt off

with his gnarled and knotted hand. "Quare business it is, Archie. Now take this here potato. I can eat it if I want to. I can bed it if I want to. Any case it's destroyed, dies."

"Dies!" Archie murmured.

"Yeh, dies, I say, just like you or me. If I bed it, it sprouts and then rots when the sprouts are pulled off, you see. If I eat it, it helps keep me alive and is gone—dead, dead and rotten both cases."

The boy clutched up a handful of dry dirt and let it slide through his long bony fingers, staring at his partner.

"Now the preachers say it's different. We ain't like other animals and things. We got a sperit, a soul, they say," Tapley went on. "But Beck there, her creeping up the road, you orter hear her talk about it."

"I hearn Pa say she's weeked."

"Tain't weekedness, Archie. Trouble brung her to it. Some it makes better, some it makes worse. It made her worse, so bad rilley till she's soured on the world, soured. She hates preachers and everybody who talks 'bout being good. She's said many and many a time that they ain't no hereafter, no heaven nor hell nor nothing. Nothing but this world, and the quicker rid of that the better."

"Good Lard!" Archie cried, turning and watching Beck with puzzled eyes as she disappeared behind the bend in the road.

"Now the Squair, Archie, you orter hear him talk about it. He can convince anybody, knows his Bible, lid to lid. Him a deacon in the church and all. He reads books a lot and has writ things in the county papers some."

"He seems to be a plumb good man to me—Christian good."

"That he is, Archie, a good man to the bottom. He's had his trouble, too, like all we earthly creatures. But he's bore all of his crosses, children dying on him, wife dead, sickness and all, and then Frank perishing in Flanders Field. And yet

the Lord's been with him, too. He's rich—land, land, plenty of it. The goods of this world have clung to him. I've heard him say in church many a time that the Lord chas'teth him who he loveth. True, Archie, gospel true. But then poor Beck, she's one of them what can't be tamed. She's fou't back all her life, and now she's bitter, hard, hard as ar'n. Cuss, she can, and abuse like a regular Turk when she chooses. But then she's soured on the world, as I said, and it's soured on her. Aih, she's been unfortunate."

He pulled out his plug of tobacco, ripped off a chew and passed it on to Archie. The boy stuffed his mouth and waited.

"At first there weren't any trouble, of course, as it always is, and then later there was." Old Tapley slowed up in his work and sat watching an ant scrambling over a clod of dirt. Then he went on. "It all happened 'fore you folks moved here from Wake County. You couldn't-a been more'n a shirt-tail boy. And the whole business was, far as I can see, on account of her being so purty. It's just like I said a few minutes back. When you get to studying about things, it all seems quare, quare. Now God A'mighty made her purty. Being purty brung her trouble. Then don't it seem like Old Moster's to blame for the misery she's suffered? He works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform, as poor Oscar Graham used to say 'fore he killed hisself in grief. And mebbe the preachers understand, though if they do they keep it mighty close to theyselves!" His words died out and he fell to watching a buzzard's high flight around the flat fiery saucer of the sun as if some solution to his metaphysical complexity were being worked out there in the bird's aimless wheeling.

"What happened to her?" Archie timidly ventured at last.

"Dinged if this bending don't git a feller's back. All wagons wear out, they say, and it's the wheel that squeals that needs the grease. Beck, they called her Becky then, was the only

child the Raglands had. Poor folks they was, tenants and harlings like you and me. And Becky was as purty as a pink, purtier she was. You see them there black eyes of hers a while ago. They set many a fellow wild in the old days back yander. They did me. Twenty year ago I never thought she'd be making a living washing and ar'ning and chopping cotton about. But she is and no 'rifmatic can deny it.

"Lord A'mighty, talking about apples and fruits and flowers—and all her hair and cheeks and eyes! And when she dressed up a-Sunday, the fellers was after her thick and heavy at church. It got so old man Ragland's yard was full of 'em on Sunday evening, laughing and talking, eating watermilyons and mushmilyons and carrying on. But she didn't give the snap of her finger for the whole passel, not her. Lively—she was, a lively one, and more'n one person said she had a wild streak in her. But she didn't mean no harm, she didn't. And she weren't proud, nuther, not too proud to work. She'd slave in the fields right along with her pa and ma, chopping cotton, putting out guano even, working in the house, anywhere. Aih me, she'd a-been a jewel for some man." As if stung by too sharp a remembrance he lapsed into silence and worked away more swiftly.

"Well, I declare!" Archie said, spitting noisily off to the left and turning his face back expectantly. "Hee-hee, she must a-been purty. I betcha she was."

"She was, I tell you. I went flying around her some myself, but her sights were set higher'n me, and it didn't take me long to find it out, I'm here to tell you. But for a long time I didn't know who it was she was a-looking at. In them days folks used to have dances round and about through the country, 'fore they got to pertending they were so churchyfied and good. Square dances and breakdowns they were. Aih, them was great times, plenty of cider and brandy and cherry bounce, and the fiddles going, swing yer pardner, promenade. Sashay,

it was, salute yer lady, and music to beat the band. All night long sometimes we'd go it till we'd wear our shoes clean through to the flesh, and then back home in time for breakfast, tired down and happy and ready to pull fodder all the whole day."

"I betcha that was a heap of fun—hee-hee," Archie cracked out gleefully, and he patted some of the bedded potatoes spasmodically with his hand.

"And you could count on Becky being there. She was the prime dancer, she was—plumb crazy about it. And music stirred her to the bottom of her soul and set her foolish and trembling in her heart. It does some folks that-a-way. Why, I've seen her so happy she'd bust out crying when Fiddling Jim Messer got to going on 'Oh Whistle and I'll Come to You.' And with her hair flying and her eyes shining, she'd make many a man's mouth water to look at her. But it come to an end for her, poor thing, as it does to all who ain't keerful enough.

"You've heard tell, no doubt, how old Fiddling Jim was found dead by his fire one night with his fiddle hugged in his arms, the same fiddle that Tim Messer, his boy, buried once when he got religion and dug up later when he fell from grace. There'd been a big Christmas breakdown over on Coharie River at old Dave Vance's house the night before, and Fiddling Jim was making the music. And he played they said, for I weren't there, like a man possessed. Never been such music in the memory of man. Old Eph Slocumb was there with his banjo too. And the way them two went at it has been handed down. All the young sports had come, them with rich daddies and them with hardly no daddies at all. Whiskey and brandy and cherry bounce flowed around like water, for Dave Vance believed in splurging when he splurged. And some of the gals got high, Becky amongst 'em, though I allus 'lowed it was Fiddling Jim's music and not the whiskey

that brung misfortune on her. Old Patting Rooney Faulkner drunk too much that night and on her way home lay down in the road and ketched her death of cold, ezzactly as old Sawyer done later on. It looked like a hand in it, for the next night old Jim died. That broke up all dancing in this neighborhood for a long time, but 'twouldn't a-made no difference to Becky, for she was done of it all now for good. Whispers soon begun to go around about her condition. And lo and behold, one day she had a boy born on her."

"Lard!" said Archie aghast.

"Yeh," said old Tapley, "a wood's colt, the baby was—or as they say, laid by a buzzard and hatched by the sun."

"Now old man Ragland was a Christian sort of man," he went on, "one that read his Bible and prayed out loud at Little Bethel. He'd never been in favor of Beck's dancing ways, and what did he do but up and turn her out, baby and all, like the Lass of Loch Royal they sing about. He put a loud curse upon her and dared her never to darken his doors again. And she never did, nuther. She was a proud one, I tell you."

"I betcha she was that," Archie breathed.

"Proud! Proud as Lucifer. The young Squair took pity on her, for he had a kind heart toward everybody, and built her that little house down the road there where she lives now. He had just married one of them fine Barclay women, and some say that she begged him into doing it. Anyhow I know she tried to make friends with Beck, but Beck shet up her mouth tight and wouldn't have nothing to do with nobody. And from then on she had a hard time. I've seen her going along the road many a morning by sunrise carrying that Will—that's what she named him—on her hip, going off to chop cotton all day. And when she'd scrub away at the tub or make soap at the pot, she'd let him crawl around on the

ground picking up scattered apple peelings and crying amongst the cats for crumbs. She treated that baby rough, and some said she didn't love it, but I found out in time that she loved it all right. She had a high temper and the way folks turned their backs upon her made her bitter and spiteful. No wonder she took some of her feeling out on the boy, though I do believe that every time she beat him it was like beating herself.

"Will grew up to be the timidest fellow alive. He was a plumb slave to the plowhandle and the hoe. And scared! He was a-scared of everything—his mother, the other hands, the mules and dogs on the farm. He crept around with a quare look in his eyes like he was making excuses for being here. He was such a pitiful fellow that it'd hurt you to look at him. He'd come to the Squair's back door in the winter and stand shivering with his cap in his hand and say, 'Muh sent me for the washing, please'm.' And Mis' Johnson would give it to him in a bag and watch him go off with the funniest look in her eyes. Once I caught her looking at him and crying a bit as he went staggering off down the road with the load of wash on his back. She was a good woman if ever there was one, that she was."

"Pore little fellow," said Archie.

"When he got to be ten year old, Beck bound him out to the Squair for a peck of meal and two pounds of meat a week. The Squair would a-giv more, but she wouldn't take a thing but reg'lar wages, she was so proud. And so he come up and went to work, eating his meals here and going home to sleep at night.

"One day—I remember it plain's if it was yistiddy—we was all waiting at the buggy house for our dinner, when Annie—the Squair's oldest daughter, a year or two younger than Will—come out and showed him the first pitcher book he'd ever seen. He was plumb tickled to death at it. Annie read to him about the pitchers and told him a whole lot she'd

learned from her teacher 'bout birds and places and things. I could see him drinking it in. We went in to dinner and all that evening in the fields he kept asking me did I reckon he could learn to read. Yes sir, he had it in him from the beginning to be something. The next day when we waited at the buggy house for dinner Annie didn't come out, and the next one she didn't. In fact she never did come out again. Something must have happened indoors. Her pa and muh didn't want her to 'sociate with him mebbe. He was game though, and never didn't complain none. But I found out later that he plagued the plumb life out'n Beck to get him a book so he could learn to read. Beck didn't have no book-learning herself to speak of, and she said she didn't see no need in poor tenant folks trying to get edgication. But that didn't stop him though, and he kept a-begging her to get him that book.

"Well, the long and short of it was that his muh fished up an old primer somewhere and started teaching him his letters. It was common talk how fast he learned. It weren't but a few months after he started studying when he picked up a newspaper at the Squair's one day and read me a piece 'bout where one man had killed another fighting with a skillet. Then the next thing happened was he wanted to go to school that winter. Beck finally give in and asked the Squair to cut down the meal and meat and let him go to school. Again he offered to send him and pay him regular wages, but Beck said no. She was so proud, you see. So he went to school.

" 'Mebbe you'll get a little backbone in you 'long with your learning!' Beck told him."

"Ain't that twelve o'clock?" Archie suddenly queried, as a whistle blew from the sawmill by Buie's Creek.

"Hanh? No, they blow a quarter till," old Tapley answered gruffly. "Let me get on with what happened, for it's worth listening to."

"Yeh, do. I jest thought it was twelve though. How did he come out at school?"

"It weren't no time 'fore he was the smartest one of 'em all. He got so he could cut 'em all down at the spelling-matches on Friday. And cipher? Got to be good as the teacher near-bout. But there was one thing he couldn't do. He couldn't get on with folks. He wouldn't have nothing to do with the other scholars. Let 'em play prison-base or cat or anything, he wouldn't take no part. When dinner time'd come, he'd get his tin bucket and go out under an oak and eat his side meat and sweet potatoes by hisself. He shore was a quare little fellow. Whilst all the other children run around and had a good time, he'd poke about in the woods or set by the stove figgering on his slate. I was hauling lumber to the siding for the Squair then—that was before I worked for poor Oscar Graham—and used to stop there and water my mules. Nobody paid much attention to his quareness, for it's understood that all wood's colts are not just like other people. Anyhow that's what folks say, a mark mebbe the Lord sets on the fatherless ones. Len Horton used to say that he'd knowed many a one of 'em, and they were all quare and curious, and smart too, he would say, for where Old Moster puts his brand he leaves his gift, folkses. That was the way he put it. And what the mouth wants the hand can give it.

"But he didn't get no more backbone in him with his learning the way Beck was hoping, no sir. He got more'n more a-scared of things and timid. Not reg'lar scared, but sorter stand-offish and soft-hearted. Dinged if he didn't get so when the rains'd come and earth worms'd be sprawling out on the ground, he'd walk around careful to one side to keep from mashing 'em. They used to laugh at him a whole lot, and I reckon they done wrong, seeing how it all turned out in the end."

"Well, help my life!" said Archie. "How did it turn out?

Ahm, pore little lonesome fellow," and he cleared his throat loudly and blinked his damp eyes.

"And how can you tell where the head of the ditch is before the ditch is dug! Well, onct, they said, while his mother was wringing a chicken's neck, he fell to crying. The chicken went dancing around with its head off and the blood squirting out'n its neck, and the boy laid down on the ground and purely hollered.

" 'What in the name o' God ails you?' Beck had asked him. And when she found out that he hated to see the chicken killed, she fell on him and beat him like a dog for being such a baby. Eh, she had temper too, she did. It come out later that after that he wouldn't eat no meat at all, not a bit of no kind. He made out to live on old greens and garden mess somehow. He kept getting worse that way. One day in the busiest season, he found a sore on old Mary's shoulder, the Squair's mule he was plowing. He tried to beg off from working the mule. The other farm hands heard him and laughed at him. The Squair was a kindly sort o' man then as he is now, but quick-tempered when his work was pushing, and he yelled out and told him to put that mule to the plow mighty drot'n quick. That boy's face was white as lace when he went to work leading the mule behind him. Scared he was. Late that evening the Squair come on him at the spring washing the mule's shoulder and fanning away the flies with a sweetgum bresh. Lord help us, he lost his temper and beat the boy. And after that this Will got quarer'n ever 'bout being quiet and shut off to hisself. Yeh, I remember it clear as day.

"That winter he finished up his 'rithmetic and blue-back speller and was done with school. He was fifteen, I think, then. The fact is he'd orter been able to a-gone on, up to the University mebbe. And he mought a-made a name for hisself. The Squair had sent his Frank there. Done no good. He wouldn't

study. But Will would a-studied. That's another thing you'll learn about this world, Archie. What ort to be ain't allus what is.

"On the last day of the school the teacher had give Will a book of poetry stuff for a prize in spelling. That was bad business too, as it later proved. It was named something like 'Star in the West,' and was composed by a Little Bethel woman who moved away to Texas and died there. Full of sad and mournful stuff it was, they say. Dinged if that boy didn't jest go crazy over that there book. Got so he'd set up all night reading it over and over till he'd got it all by heart. I've knowed him to take it to the fields with him and plow with one hand and read all at the same time. Beck'd wake up and run him to bed at night, but 'twouldn't do no good. The next night the same thing'd happen."

"He kept getting thinner when summer come on. I myself worked at him and tried to get him to eat right and sleep a-plenty. But it didn't do no good. And the first news you knowed he had a bad cough. His muh'd storm and bang and quarrel, but somehow he'd always get around her. At times she'd come in his entry-room past midnight and find him writing in an old tablet. She'd grab up the lamp and take it out of the room. What he was so busy writing she didn't find out till later, and then it was too late, course it was. Aih, he was a funny one. 'Bout that time one of the Squair's main hands left him and he was in need of somebody to stay in the store and keep the books and wait on customers. He run a big business then—store, farming, and shipping turpentine to Fayetteville. And in the winter when the river was high he'd raft lumber down to Wilmington. He took the boy away from the rough outside work and put him to clerk in the store. That was a big raise for him, and a lot of us thought the Squair'd ruin him, setting him up so. But it didn't seem

to make no difference to Will. He kept on going around like a fellow in a dream. And durned if he didn't fetch that old tablet to the store and write in it when he got a chanct. So it happened that customers were kept waiting, and soon complaints got started. The Squair come in once and had to call to him several times 'fore the boy woke up out'n his book. He got a cussing out then, all right, but he didn't say nary a word, just stood there and took it.

"The only person who could wake him up and make him take a interest in things was Annie. You never saw her, did you? She married a big city man the year 'fore you all moved down here. She had come back from boarding school the summer Will was working in the store. He'd look at her with them wild eyes o' his'n, like his mammy's, and fall to trembling all over. I've seen it happen time and again my ownself. Yes sir, you could tell in a little while that he pure was a-worshiping her, and she was interested in him, too, though they weren't nothing but children, as you might say. Well, before the middle of summer he had the books and the store business all fixing to get in a mess, and the Squair took him out and put him back in the woods to help pull the hack and rive staves. Whether he done it on account of the store or on account of Annie, I don't know. The rains and vapors of the swamp was too much for him, and in August he took to his bed. Beck stormed at him and abused him worse'n ever, and her tongue drip-dropped her anger on him.

" 'Lord God a-mercy!' she'd moan, 'come home to die, have you?—after I've worked my fingers to the bone to edgicate you!' She hadn't, of course, but then she was getting more hard and bitter by that time. He'd never say a word, just lie there with the hot water running out'n his eyes and down his face. 'Oh, there you go crying, do you?' she'd go on. 'Well, say something, answer me back—oh, but he won't, he never says nothing—nothing—Jesus, what's he made of!' And she'd

stir around the house working like something afire and wiping her eyes with her apron. After while she'd come up to him and throw her arms around him and cry and cry."

"Anh!" said Archie, gulping, clearing his throat and patting the potatoes again.

"He didn't get no better, and he coughed all the time. I'd go there and set up with him two or three nights most every week. Beck didn't ask me to, but I thought I ort. 'Long toward the last she sent for old Aunt Til who knowed all about snake-root tea and plasters and mess. She took one good look at him and said he had galloping consumption and 'ud be gone in a week. He kept right on scratching in that old tablet on the sly, till he was too weak to hold his pencil. Wouldn't let us see what he had writ, not nary a word he wouldn't. The Squair sent a doctor over. He didn't stay long and went off without saying much one way or the other. The morning after that Mis' Johnson and Annie come down and brung a whole lot of flowers. When they'd gone, that boy mashed his face in an armful of 'em and broke into the loudest squalling I ever heard. The next morning Beck went out to feed the pig, and when she come back in she found him dead in his bed."

"Dead!" Archie gasped.

"Dead, dead as a wedge. Beck run out in the lane and woke up the neighborhood with her wailing. I went by and got Aunt Marg'ret and quick as we could we went down. And there he lay with the blood all over his pillow. He'd had a hemorrhage while she was a-feeding the pig. Old Aunt Til come in by and by, and we laid him out. Lord, he weren't nothing but skin and bones, and cold as an icicle. From then on Beck didn't utter nary a cry.

"The next day we put him away in the graveyard. The Squair and his wife and Annie and a few others were all was there. Lem Whitaker led in a song. After they'd roached up

the grave, Annie stepped out crying like her heart would break and laid some roses on. Mis' Johnson was crying too, poor thing. But Beck didn't cry, not her. And the Squair stood up straight and handsome and looked hard before him. When it was over, Beck come over and looked down at the headboard. Old Clem Morgan had burnt some letters on it with a piece of hot iron—I still got a picture of how it looked in my mind—'Will Ragland, Age 16 years and 8 months. He sleeps.'

"Beck looked at it awhile and went off across the fields to her little house by herself. From that day to this she's been like she is now—soured and bitter at the world.

"That evening I stopped in to help Beck clean out the house and scour the furniture to get rid of the germs and all. The Squair had said for me to be sure to do it. Whilst we was moving his bed in the other room, that old tablet of his'n fell out from under the mattress. I picked it up, and Aunt Til who was there asked me what it was. 'Mess he killed hisself a-writing,' Beck said like she was mad. And she snatched it out'n my hand. 'Wouldn't never let me see what it was,' she went on, turning over the leaves. All of a sudden she broke out, 'It's old poetry stuff!' 'Is? Read a speck of it,' Aunt Til begged. Beck handed the book back to me and went out'n the house. I looked through it and there was all sorts of speeches writ out, some of 'em about birds that'd been hurt with a bean-shooter, grasshoppers with legs pulled off, wilted flowers, and one I remember about a frog that got mashed in a wheel-ruck."

"The dog's foot!" said Archie. And he wiped his eyes with his sleeve.

"Aunt Til kept crowding up and telling me to read out loud. I never weren't no hand to read, but I spelt out one, something about 'when I am dead and buried, love, please think of me.' Right then Beck come back in and snatched

the tablet out'n my hand again and crammed it in the wood stove and burnt it up. She was mad, plumb mad at something, and she said, 'What did that poor fool know of love?'

"Hanh, there goes the twelve o'clock whistle. Yeh, he was too spindly and quare for this world, Will Ragland was, and God the Saviour have called him into Abraham's Bosom. So may He call us all at the last day, blessed be his name."

Old Tapley crawled stiffly to his feet and started waddling toward the lane and dinner.

"He shore were a quare little boy," Archie murmured as he followed him.

"Yeh," said Tapley, lifting a slow heavy leg over the rail fence. "I never knowed one them fellows hatched by the sun that weren't. And besides the Squair hisself is quare at times."

"The Squair?" said Archie.

"Yeh, he was his daddy as everybody knows. But he repented of it all long, long ago. Poor Beck never has, and won't. She loves the Squair till this day and allus will. And for any little whistling he might make to her, she'd still come a-running to him. But of course he never will."

Bernie and the Britches

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF ROADS LEADING to our little thriving southern agricultural town. And as you approach on any of them, you are likely to see a good splashing sign carrying the big-lettered name of Bernard Randall, dealer in real estate, horses, mules, farm equipment, and fertilizer. And then when you get inside the town you are further confronted with Bernard Randall's success as a businessman. On the corner of Main and High Streets is Randall's Drugstore. A block higher up on Main Street is Randall's Hardware Store, above which is the owner's suite of real estate offices. And farther south in the edge of the town by the railroad tracks is his livery stable.

Now to see Bernie you wouldn't think he could ever have become the go-getter he has. A rather spindly fellow he is, of medium height, sandy-haired, pale-faced and with vague blue eyes. And his manner is still as hesitant and halting as ever it was in his humbler days. And he has never yet learned to wear his clothes the way he should wear them, though he's now plenty well able to buy fine quality and fit for the wearing.

As our old local historian and philosopher, Mr. Mac, has

said many a time, and as everybody knows, the ways of fate and luck in the making of a man's life are a strange and fearful thing. Just the other night I was reading a poem about how a man comes to a dividing of the road. Shall he take the right turn or the left turn? He takes the right turn, say, and in the words of the poet, that made all the difference. Sometimes a glance, a nod, a sudden whim or fancy will change the course of a man's life forever. A smudge of soot on your sweetheart's nose, the wrong word spoken and not meant, a broken tooth, the wayward laugh, the missed train—whatever it is.

Of course when accidents happen, and wayward touches and circumstances come into the course of a man's life to turn it, the man on whom destiny places her vote is the one who is able to grab the sudden chance that comes and make the most of it or skip nimbly out of the way if it is a mischance. No doubt that is true.

Now Bernie Randall happened to seize the bit of luck, or ill-luck some would be forced to call it, when it came to him one night. And from that time onward his climb to power and wealth was steady.

And Bernie seemed the last person in the world to whom good luck would come. Nobody ever expected him to amount to anything. As I've said, he was awkward, timid and uncertain with his weak friendly smile, and homely as an old shoe. His people were poor as church mice and lived down by the railroad track just a block or so from where later Bernie had his livery stables. His father was sickly and an addict to patent medicines, and early the responsibility of his mother and father fell pretty much on the thin shrinking shoulders of their only child.

Bernie grew up a drudge. From the time he was six or seven he was running errands for his parents, sweeping leaves out of people's yards, hiring out to pick cotton in some of the fields that came up to the edge of the town, even trying

to shine shoes, or standing on the corner dumb and fearful on Saturday afternoons with an armful of *Grit* newspapers. But through all his twistings and turnings of odd jobs, he never developed the sharpness and quickness that one usually associates with an American boy in such situations. Rather he continued his humble and lonely browbeaten way.

Somehow he got a little schooling now and then in the winter months—enough to learn to read and write and do fairly simple sums in arithmetic. And later when he was big enough for his daddy to swear him by the child labor law, he got a job weaving in the cotton mill. And there as time went on he met up with May Eppinger who worked at one of the looms.

May was a pretty round-faced girl with a light laugh and a love for milk-shakes at the corner drugstore. Bernie early fell in love with her. His devotion was dog-like and persistent. No matter with what levity or even bursts of scorn May treated him he continued his dreamings and devotions to her.

In time Bernie's mother and father died and he was left alone in the little house that had been their home. It was a rented place, and now Bernie indulged in planning for his own wide-open future.

From his earnings at the loom he was able to make a mortgage deal with young Ed Weatherford down at the bank to buy the little place. And so he started paying monthly installments on it.

Every now and then he would abstract a dollar or two from his thin savings and get a box of candy for May. And once or twice he was able to get ahead enough and persuade her to go with him on an excursion to the fair at Raleigh.

But of course come wet weather or dry, he must somehow scrape together enough each month for his house payments. And regularly he would take his few dollars down to the

bank and there hand them over to Weatherford who in a swift round business hand would write out the receipt and hand it through the grill to Bernie with a cool and pleasant air.

Young Weatherford was everything that Bernie was not. He was handsome, educated at the University, and sure of a big future with the power and money he had inherited from his father. Already he was one of the keymen in the bank, and as old Josh Overby, the lumberman said, was as sharp at getting interest and financing fees as ever you could find. "Yes, sir," said old Josh, "where his daddy made thousands, young Ed will make millions, watch my word."

When Bernie was twenty-five and May was near the same age, they got married. During the years she had had swarms of boy friends of her class in the mill section, but somehow time had gone by and she was no nearer married than before. Perhaps her boy friends liked the idea of courting her better than they did of marrying her. Whether from weariness of working at the mill or whatnot, she finally married Bernie, and began to take her ease in the little house down by the railroad track.

And that's just what Bernie liked. He wanted her to stay cool and comfortable. "You've already done your share of hard work, Baby," he would say. Soon after they were married he started calling her Baby. And she liked it. She liked to be treated as a baby. She liked for him to wait on her and spoil her. She would lie abed in the morning and he would be up, fixing his breakfast and off to the mill. And during the day she would loll about the house in an easy wrapper, looking at catalogues, eating bits of the candy and sweets Bernie would bring her, reading the comics and taking her ease. She could never seem to get enough of resting and sitting on the porch and rocking and looking off across the railroad tracks and drowsily daydreaming. And now and then when she

could get a couple of dimes from Bernie she would go to the movies.

Weeks and months went by, one year, two years. The routine was the same. May was taking it easy, and Bernie was working like a dog in the mills. But however hard he worked, his promotion was slow. He never could learn how to deal with people, become swift and to the point, authoritative, a manager. After all the years of service in the cotton mill he was only a master beamer. Others, younger and less experienced passed him by and became floor bosses or loom inspectors or even superintendents.

But Bernie didn't worry too much. He had May. And after all, in his own humble opinion, it was quite fitting that others should become successful and he should continue in the rut he was in, though he would never think of it as a rut.

And May's little selfish demandings and spoilings continued. The neighbors saw how things were going and some of them spoke their minds about it.

"I feel so sorry for poor Bernie," said old Miz Keziah Turnage. "Thet lazy girl lies around, dolls herself up and don't turn a hand a bit and grain to help him."

"It's the truth, Ma," said Lulu Turnage, her bony-shouldered daughter who would have been glad to have behaved so differently to Bernie.

"But then men are such fools," said Miz Turnage, whose husband, a preacher, had been had up in the church for giving a choir girl a string of beads on the sly and who now was dead and buried, and another man was counting the beads.

"Yes, and Bernie's the biggest fool of 'em all," said Lulu venomously as she went on with ironing her pink blouse for Sunday.

"And he'll be drove hard and put up muddy all his life, hear me," said Miz Keziah, and she continued churning her butter energetically.

"He orter had a better wife," said Lulu.

"Hmn!" said Miz Keziah, clearing her throat angrily.

Now Bernie, the subject of the neighbors' discourse, was indeed at that very moment being driven hard. He was down at the bank in the inner office talking to young Ed Weatherford who was now an assistant cashier. He was arranging a loan of three thousand dollars on his house for remodeling it. Of recent months May had begun to wheedle him about the place they lived in. It was a shame and a disgrace and not hardly fit for dogs, she declared. And Bernie looking at her plumpish and cool and fragrant form in her loose flowered housegown knew with excruciating certainty that she was right. What a place to keep his darling, his golden honey-one in. And so after succumbing to a stiff financing fee plus the regular six per cent interest, and agreeing to a whole string of whereases, parties of the first part, parties of the second part, hereinafters and befores, he arranged with young Weatherford for the loan.

"Where'll I sign the paper?" said Bernie.

"Right here," said Ed. "You both'll have to sign it—you and your wife. And it'll have to be notarized too," he went on.

"Yes, sir," said Bernie.

"It might be more convenient to have your wife drop in here. We have a notary in the bank."

And so Bernie went off and brought Baby down. And she dressed up especially for the occasion. And there she signed the paper and Ed Weatherford looked at her as she signed. And she looked up at him and dropped her eyes and gave a little laugh, and taking Bernie by his thin and rawbony arm she went away.

Young Ed gazed after them as they went and an introspective and almost indistinct whistle pfuii-ed through his lips. He turned to his secretary and handed her the papers.

"Keep these in the current file," he said. "We'll maybe see how things go."

Then began the clattering and hammering and sawing of the carpenters as the house was remodeled, and the clanging and cracking ring of the mason's trowel building the two chimneys. The noise got on Baby's nerves and she went over to stay with her mother and father until the work was done. And when finally it was finished and Bernie had cleaned and swept the house and got the furniture arranged back, she came and took up her place there in it like the spoiled queen bee she was.

And the pinch on Bernie was harder now. It was tough, making the monthly payments on the loan. And once when he fell sick and lost a few week's time from working, the first cold grip of despair got its bite into his stolid and lightless soul. He looked at Baby propped up in bed reading a murder serial in the newspapers and for once he wrung his hands.

"What am I going to do?" he queried.

She looked at him comfortably and reached over and patted his thin long pallid hand. "My Bernie'll find a way out," she smiled. "He always does. Kiss your baby and take that frown off your face." He bent over and kissed her on the forehead with cold and colorless lips. Then he sat down by the bed and stared at the floor.

"That Ed Weatherford won't show me no mercy," he said. "I can draw ahead on the mill enough to pay the next installment. But after that—" and he shook his head.

"I seen an ad in the paper the other day," May spoke up, "where it said salesman wanted at $40.00 a week."

"Hah!" said Bernie.

"It's fifteen dollars a week more'n you're making now," she said sharply.

"Me a salesman!" said Bernie mirthlessly.

"You could get the job. I betcha Ed—Mr. Ed Weatherford would help you get it."

"Not him," said Bernie. "He'd never help anybody. It's money, money, money with him," and then he added, "and women."

"Women?" she laughed.

"Everybody knows how he is about—about that," said Bernie. "That time we were down there in the bank signing the papers, I saw him looking at you."

"Did you?" she said lightly.

"Course I couldn't blame him for that," said Bernie, patting her hand, " 'cause you're the prettiest thing that ever come down the pike. But still—" His voice died out in a sigh.

"Ain't that the soup boiling over?" she said.

"Bless my life," he cried, and with that he sprang up and dashed into the kitchen.

Later when they were eating their supper she brought the subject up again.

"You could make good money at that salesman business. You don't have to talk much, just show the stuff and carry the samples around and take orders."

"But my education," he said.

"Education, the dog's foot! You write a good hand, good enough to put orders down. I'm going to Ed Weatherford myself and ask him—"

"No, you're not," he said. "If anybody's got to go, I will."

And so a few days later he did. And to his surprise Ed Weatherford recommended him and he got the job. And more than that—the young banker helped him arrange along with the agency to get him a second-hand Ford car in which to cover the territory assigned to him.

"Now all you got to do, Bernie," he said with a laugh, "is get in and go to it."

And so began Bernie's days as a vacuum cleaner salesman. He worked at it hard. Nobody could deny that. He was up early and gone to distant points, whether an outlying farm or a village or hamlet in another county. But however far he went, he was always back home sometime at night to be with his Baby. Yet, however hard he worked, he could barely make a living. Depression days were coming on now and sales resistance was growing. He intensified his efforts, he drove farther, he was up earlier, he worked later and now and then so far a-field did he go in his endeavors to sell his product that he was unable to get back at night.

The picture looked darker and darker. Sometimes when he was up and away at early dawn and the installment was coming due at the bank, he would have May go down and pay it.

Things were tightening up a bit all along the line and Weatherford's bank was retrenching some. Weatherford would go out visiting among the farmers and creditors, foreclosing here and collecting there, and often he would come humming home at night in his blue Cadillac with quite a roll in his pocket, sometimes as much as $5,000 to be deposited the next day.

That's the way it was with him. Whatever he went at, he succeeded. And all the while Bernie Randall was coming on down to bankruptcy.

One day Bernie got up early to start one of his dreary rounds. He'd heard that over at Wilson, a town some fifty or sixty miles away, there were several prospects. He told May he wouldn't be back that night and for her to get one of her sisters to come and stay with her.

"Pshaw, I'm not afraid to stay by myself," she said, putting out her pretty lips in a pout.

"You do what I say," he said.

"Go along with you," she said, "and I'll expect you back tomorrow night."

"Yes, tomorrow night," he said. And he drove off.

A half a hundred miles he drove, and then set to work in the virgin territory going from house to house. But sales resistance was a hundred per cent that day. The tobacco market had just opened and the price was bad and the papers had given the prospects as being even less encouraging for the future. And this was a tobacco country. Later in the afternoon, Bernie, completely whipped down, decided to drive around by Raleigh and talk things over with the head of the regional office.

"I'm very glad you called in," said Mr. Wayburn.

"Well," said Bernie smiling.

And that was the last time he smiled for many a day. For then the news hit him smash in the face. The regional office had decided to cancel his agency. A letter had already been written and dispatched that very day, saying so. Mr. Wayburn kindly showed him a carbon copy in which with the usual regrets and so forth the company had found it necessary to dispense with his services.

"I reckon you'll want your sample that I've got with me," said Bernie, trying to keep his voice steady.

"I'm afraid so," said Mr. Wayburn.

Bernie went out and brought it in from the car. His legs were shaking, and there was a dull nauseated feeling in his chest, sagging and going on down to his stomach. He handed over his sales pad, shook hands with Mr. Wayburn and went away.

Outside, he sat in his parked car a long while, staring ahead of him through the windshield—staring at a dull blank wall, a wall nobody else could see, but he could see as if in a blinding light. There was no hole in that wall through which he could go.

He must have sat there for hours. The darkness came down. The street lights flared on, and tap, tap went the heels of the working girls going home and the heavier solider tread of men folks passing by. Up the street was the marquee of a movie theatre advertising in shimmering letters "The Love Nest." Bernie read the sign abstractedly. He smiled wryly, quoting to himself, "The Love Nest." He remembered now that Baby had seen that picture. She had liked it.

The words "love nest" echoed in his brain. Secretly and deeply to himself he had often thought of his little house and Baby in it as his love nest. Well, it would all be different now. He had lost his nest. The bank would foreclose on him like the jaws of a steel trap. He knew Ed Weatherford well enough for that.

"He won't show me no mercy," he said to himself. "And it's a bargain he'll get. That's the way them fellows make their money. They get poor guys like me in their grip and gripe and then they squeeze 'em and take away what they got. And then they turn around and sell it to somebody else for double what it's worth."

Wait till he got home and told Baby the news of what had happened. But how could he tell her, how could he break her heart like that? And in his mind he could see her, lying up in bed, beautiful and sweet, a wonder and a joy for any man to be proud of.

"Yes, lying in bed," he said to himself. He wasn't trying to put meaning into the words. He was only reciting them to himself, and then suddenly they had a meaning and he didn't like the feeling that came over him.

For the first time in his life Bernie Randall began to feel sorry for himself. Maybe for the first time he was seeing himself as he really was, a poor plodding dull fellow, hard put on by others.

"Yeh, I work hard as I can," he said to himself as he sat

there in the car and as the people flowed by. "And it says in the Bible about a helpmeet. And the preacher when he said them words over us said honor and obey and cherish and love. Well, that's what I do. I did and I do. But—"

He shook his head and cut off his thought. There was something doleful about it. He could feel it coming on, thought. No, it wouldn't do to think like that. Wasn't he the luckiest man in seven counties. Wasn't he married to the sweetest, prettiest girl round and about. Didn't all kinds of other fellows want to marry her in the days gone by. They hung around her in droves, but she chose him, him, Bernie Randall. Well, he was thankful. He appreciated her, he sure did, and he could never do enough to pay back to her for what she had given him—herself.

There must be some way out. There must be. He couldn't drag her down into complete poverty and have to start living all over again in a rented two-room mill shack and he back in the mill beaming away. From morn to evening beaming away —and the lint sucking into his lungs.

Yes, she'd been right, wanting to get him out of that place, get him out into the open air, doing a job that was better, being a salesman—"My husband, he's a salesman for the National Electric Company." That sounded so much better than having to say, "My husband works at a loom in the cotton mill."

She had ambition for him, that's what. She wanted him to get ahead. He thanked her for it, and thanks was all she'd get. For now he'd failed. He'd failed her.

He bent his head over on the steering wheel, sick at heart. Thinking, thinking, planning, planning—and seeing no light, not a glimmer.

Sometime later in the night a policeman came up and rapped on the door. He woke from a cold and aching sleep.

"This is a business section," said the policeman. "You can't park here all night."

"Yes, sir," said Bernie in his spasmodic, halting way. He looked about him. The street was deserted. The neon lights on the theatre marquee had gone out.

"What time is it, sir?" he asked.

"Past twelve o'clock, son," said the cop.

"Thank you." Bernie stepped on the starter, finally got his old jaloppy shaking and choking, and then he pulled out and drove off.

Through the night he drove toward home. There ahead of him he could see the starry hunter and the dog, or the box with the handle to it as some folks called it, rising high in the sky.

"Eh, them stars," he said bitterly to himself. "Cold and no mercy in 'em. They look down on the earth, look down on man. On me. And what do they care about me, about anything. Cold, cold as Ed Weatherford's eyes!"

The words were running easy on his motionless tongue. That's the way it was with him. Inside himself he could talk and speak slick enough. He found words a-plenty when he wanted them. But when he tried to say them out, then that was another thing.

"The preachers say there's a God that lives beyond them stars," he went on. "And so they pray to him. They ask him for help. I've never prayed for anything nor asked him for anything." He glanced up and spoke in a loud vehement voice in the night, a voice that could have been heard by any passer-by above the clattering noise of his old Ford. "Well, I ask you now, God, to help me. I've come about to the end of my rope. I don't know where to turn. I'm going to lose all I've worked to earn. My wife will hate me for it. Help me, God. I'm asking you, help me this time and I won't ask you no more."

Well, believe it or not, God maybe heard Bernie, and his prayer was answered before that night was over. But it was answered in a way he would never have dreamed of and maybe wouldn't have wanted if he had.

When he got within a block of his home he cut his rattle-trap motor off and let his car roll silently up to the house, as was his custom when coming in late. He was always careful not to wake Baby. He got out softly and walked along the grass up to the little front porch. When he had remodeled the house he had planted grass and flowers out in front, and he could see a few of the late roses blooming and hanging their heads in the pale starlight. And in spite of his misery there was a warm feeling in him to see the flowers. They reminded him of Baby. She was so like a flower. And in a moment he would be snuggled up against her warm soft body. And with his arms around her, he would forget for a little bit some of the black misery that was packed up killingly inside him. He took off his shoes and crept across the porch. With his key which he kept for emergency home-comings, he opened the door softly and went into the hall. He set his light pasteboard suit-case down quietly and made his way along the little hall to the bedroom.

He felt for the door, it was partly opened and he slipped on in. He took off his coat and trousers in the darkness and laid them on a chair. It was just like him, awkward as he was, to bump into a chair and make a noise.

Baby's voice cried out from the bed in sheer and sudden terror. "What's that?"

"S-s-h," he said, "nobody but me, Baby." There was a stifling shaking noise from the bed. "I didn't mean to scare you," he said. "Wait'll I turn on the light."

"No, no!" And her voice was quick and frantic. He was fumbling along the wall for the switch.

"What's the matter?"

"Don't, don't," she moaned, "don't turn on the light."

"Why, Baby?"

"Oh, I've got the most awfulest headache," she said. "I—I don't know what to do with it. It's killing of me. No, please don't turn on the light, please. My eyes would hurt so, my eyes!"

"Sure, sure," he said. "Can't I rub you? Get a hot pad?" He was feeling toward the bed.

"Don't, don't," she moaned, and he could hear her sitting up in the bed, and rocking from side to side. "Go down to the drugstore, right away, quick, and get me some aspirin. I got to have it. It come on all of a sudden, it's killing me! Oh!"

"But the drugstore's all closed up, Baby."

"Ned Sauls, the clerk, sleeps right above it, you can call him. Please, please, hurry, hurry."

So agonized, so wild was her manner that he turned quickly to do her bidding.

"Yes, yes, Baby. I'll put on my britches and my coat and I'll go right away." He bumped into another chair, then finally located his trousers, pulled them on, fumbled around some more, got his coat and made his way swiftly out of the room. He set off running toward the drugstore two blocks away, pulling on his coat as he ran. When he got there he grabbed up handfuls of gravel from a near-by walk and threw them up at the second story window and soon waked the clerk. He explained how his wife May had been taken suddenly with a pain in the head and needed something to quiet her.

"I'll be right down," said Ned Sauls.

In a moment Ned had come down, dressed in an old bathrobe, turned on the lights and let him into the store. He got the aspirin and handed it to Bernie.

"Sorry to bother you like this," said Bernie.

"That's all right," said Ned. "When was she taken?"

"Sometime during the night," said Bernie.

"Does she have 'em often, headaches, I mean?"

"No, first time I've ever knowed it. That's what scares me."

"Maybe I'd better get her up something a little stronger."

"Yeh, that'd be good," said Bernie thankfully. Ned brought forth a little pellet box.

"I'm supposed to have a prescription for this, but seeing it's you, Bernie, I'll go ahead and help you out."

"Thanky," said Bernie. "I'd a-come sooner if I'd a-knowed, but I been away on the road and—"

"That's luminol."

"How much I owe you?"

"Fifty cents. How's business on the road?"

Bernie reached into his pocket for the money. "Business?—well—" But he got no further, for his hand which had gone into his pocket for a loose bit of change, came out spasmodically and like a thing alive and of itself. And in the astounded hand which he held before him, Bernie saw a great roll of bills with a rubberband around them. He stared at the bills, a wad so big that even his own long fingers and thumb would not quite enclose it. In frozen and astounded silence, Ned the clerk looked over at the wad of bills with popping eyes a moment. "Jerusalem," he finally exploded, "business must have been good."

"Hah, hah, hah," Bernie laughed vacuously and mechanically. "Looks—er—like it," he added, stuttering.

"It does that. How much you got there? Aw, hush my big mouth."

"Hah, hah," said Bernie again, and his voice sounded high, almost shrill.

Ned the clerk was looking at him with growing admiration in his face. "Daggone my hide, you must be some salesman. I reckon that'll make folks eat their words."

"Yeah, folks, what'd they say?" he queried as his hand holding the bills was slowly lowered by his side.

Bernie let his gaze travel downward. A shock went through his spare frame though he made no outward sign.

He was wearing another man's trousers.

"You know how folks are—well, Bernie, none of us expected you to make much of a go as a salesman."

"Didn't?"

"Well, now, I'm afraid not."

"Reckon you'd better charge it," he said abruptly.

"Oh, sure, sure."

Bernie turned away. He slid the roll of bulging bills back into his pocket. He called back, "Much obliged to you, Ned."

"Glad to do it, Bernie, glad. And, say, anytime you want anything—anything—just call me up and I'll put it on the books—rush it right out for you."

"Thanky," Bernie called as he went through the door.

"Good night."

"Good night."

The clerk stared after him awhile, then turned off the light, and went thoughtfully back upstairs.

Bernie took his time in walking home. It was only a short distance, but a lot of things were happening in his head as he walked. Thoughts were flashing by, ideas happening, the gears inside were turning as they never had before.

As he got near the house he tried to whistle. But his lips were so dry that he had to wet them with his tongue. And after several efforts he finally got out a stave or two of about the only song he knew, called "Beulah Land" which he had learned in Sunday school years before. Baby would hear him and know that he was coming back. Then he saw that he didn't have to whistle any more, for far down the sidewalk he discerned the figure of a man rapidly disappearing into

the darkness. And he knew who the man was and he knew too that he was wearing away a pair of slick-seated blue trousers with about two dollars change in the pockets.

For a moment he stood under the street light looking at a leather key case which he had pulled out and held in his hand. Stamped in gold letters on the case was the name E. F. Weatherford.

"F stands for Fitzhugh," Bernie said queerly and factually to himself.

As he got near the house a light came on in Baby's bedroom. He went into the kitchen, got a glass of cold water and took it to her. She was sitting up in bed bent over with her arms wrapped around her knees. She didn't look up when he came into the room but just sat there.

"Here you are, Baby," he said, holding out the glass. "I got you some luminol too." She said nothing. "You got the light on," he said.

"Yes," she mumbled, "I'm feeling a little better now."

"Take this," he said. He held out a couple of grains of luminol. She took them, threw them in her mouth, reached for the glass of water and drank them down. Then she lay back in the bed and pulled the covers up to her chin.

"Thanky," she said.

"That's all right, Baby," he said. He turned away, set the glass down and slowly began to undress. His back was turned toward her, but he knew she was looking at him now.

"Have a good trip?" she finally inquired.

"No, not so good. I'll tell you about it tomorrow." He hung his coat on a chair and started to slide his suspenders down over his shoulders. His hands stopped and he snapped them back up. Baby turned her soft curved body over in bed, making room for him. He went to the door and stood with his hand resting on the light switch.

"I'm sure sorry you're feeling so bad."

"Oh, I'm a lot better now. That medicine

"I thought I told you to get Minnie to com you," and he looked around at her. She was staring u ceiling now, and as she spoke he could hear her voice trem a little.

"Oh, pshaw, there was nobody to bother me. I wasn't afraid."

"Good," he said, "that's good. I'll turn off the light now."

"Yeh, do and come to bed."

He switched off the light and went on into the hall. He heard her body jack-knife up in bed again and she called after him. "Ain't you coming to bed?"

"I'm going to lie down out here," he said. "I got some figuring to do." He listened and she said no more. He stretched himself out on the sofa which was set against the wall in the little combination entrance hall and living room. He lay there in the darkness. Presently he heard Baby moving herself in bed again, stretching and getting fixed, and then giving a sort of easeful sigh as she pulled the cool sheet up over her soft big breasts and under her chin. He couldn't see her, but he knew that's what she was doing. She loved to pull the sheet up that way. And sometimes when they were close together they'd pull the sheet up over both their heads and look at themselves like children playing playhouse as the light shone through from the outside. He remembered the first day they were married. Ah—

A tiny noise sounded in his throat as if he were choking. He sat up and bent over, his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hand. A long while he sat there. Baby's breath was coming regularly from the next room, a little husky, animal, snuggy sound.

"Lordy mercy, she's already asleep," he said to himself incredulously.

He stood up and with his shoes in his hand slipped out

..k door and sat on the back steps looking out ..mall plot of vegetable garden. All night he sat ..d when the dawn was breaking and the chilly birds chattering in the maples along the street, he went in and ..anged into his one remaining suit of clothes. Presently he came out with a little package. He went over to the incinerator in the yard which he'd built out of bricks in his spare hours so everything would be kept neat for Baby. He started a fire in the incinerator and stood there while the package burned up. Then he went back into the house and began cooking breakfast.

Later he brought her coffee and toast and eggs to her in bed as he'd done many times before. He spoke to her in his usual voice. As he set the tray down, he kissed her on the forehead and said, "How're you feeling this morning, Baby?"

For an instant she looked deep into his eyes, into his vague blue eyes, and they were the same eyes she had always looked into and they said no more or no less to her than they had always said.

"I'm all right," she said. And she sat briskly up and reached for a cup of coffee. "Uhm, it does smell good."

She sat drinking, peering over the rim of the cup with her wide lovely sleep-freshened eyes. Innocent and fresh and dewy and no blue circles or hollows there. And Bernie felt there should have been.

"Hah! Walking in blindness," he muttered to himself.

"What?" she said. And he thought he saw the cup shaking in her hand for an instant.

"Just a way I got lately," he said, "talking to myself sometimes. My daddy used to do that."

"Well, quit it," she said sharply. "You got me to talk to."

"Yeh, Baby, I have," he said. For a moment she drank her coffee in little gulps. He could see the swallowing movements of her pretty throat as the wads of fluid went down.

Suddenly his knees shook and he sat weakly in his chair. She looked over at him perplexed.

"What's the—the matter?" she said.

"Nothing," he said.

A thought had struck him like a flash. A man over beyond Black River had with his two bare hands strangled his wife one night in bed. He dragged his sleeve across his forehead, then stood quickly up.

"I'll be going off today," he said.

"Where?"

"I've got some business. I'll be back later."

Bernie got in his car and headed out of town. For an hour or so he drove across the country and came to a neighboring village and went into a bank. There he exchanged his huge roll of worn bills for newer and larger denominations—Ed Weatherford could never claim these as his money. Then he came out and drove back home.

The next day just before noon time, Bernie Randall appeared at one of the bank windows. "Morning, Miss Raeford," he said.

"Morning, Bernie," she said, without too much respect in her voice. It was the same old thing. He had come about his small payment.

"I'd like to see Mr. Weatherford," he said.

"He's busy," she said. "You can take the matter up with me as usual."

"I want to see him," said Bernie. His manner caused her to glance up. He was looking at her straight and unblinking.

"All right," she said, and she went away. In a moment the door to an inner office opened and Weatherford appeared in it. He held the knob in his hand as if ready to step back and close the door at any moment. Bernie didn't smile. His face

never changed, but there was a sort of queer smile deep in his soul to see Weatherford holding on to the knob.

"What is it?" called Weatherford from the distance where he stood.

"I thought," said Bernie, "I'd like to see you a little bit about my mortgage."

"All right, what is it, Bernie."

"I'd like to pay it off."

Pierce Slocumb, a young teller over to the right, looked suddenly around in astonishment.

"Oh," said Weatherford, "you do."

"Yeh," said Bernie.

"There's no hurry," said Weatherford. "The bank's satisfied the way it is—pay it by the month."

"I'm not satisfied," said Bernie.

Young Pierce kept staring at him.

"Bring the papers out, Pierce," said Weatherford abruptly. "Are you paying by a check, Bernie?"

For a moment Bernie was silent and then said, "No, I'd rather pay cash."

"Part?"

"No, the full amount, the full three thousand." He pulled out some bills and laid them on the counter, but kept his hand on them. "I got thirty $100 bills here," he said, "new ones." For a moment Weatherford stood looking at him.

"All right," he said abruptly. He took the papers from Pierce, went through them, stamped them, wrote across them with a flourish that they were paid, and handed the batch out to Bernie. Bernie took them with one hand and shoved the money over with the other. Pierce and Miss Raeford stood looking on wide-eyed.

"And I'd like to pay off the note on my car."

"Get that too," Weatherford said a little hoarsely. Pierce went off and brought back some papers. They were likewise

stamped and marked paid and Bernie handed over four crisp $100 bills. He took his cancelled papers.

"Thanky, Ed," he said. This was the first time he'd ever addressed the banker without a handle to his name.

"You're welcome," said Weatherford coldly.

"And I reckon this sorta squares things betwixt us," Bernie concluded.

"Well,—then—all right—glad it does," Weatherford answered hastily.

"Good day," said Bernie. And with that he turned and went out of the bank. As soon as the door had closed behind him, young Pierce exploded.

"Gee whillikins," he said, "reckon that fellow must have found a gold mine. Or maybe he stole it."

"A young man working in a bank shouldn't talk too much," said Weatherford icily.

"Yes, sir." And Pierce hurried back to his work. Weatherford swept the bills into the till, turned and re-entered his inner office.

The depression came down pretty fierce after this and began to wipe out Ed Weatherford's holdings one by one. Like the fellows on Wall Street he had over-extended himself and had to pull in his horns. At the bottom of the market Bernie—with the fifteen hundred dollars he still had left—made a down payment on a farm in the edge of the town which had formerly belonged to Weatherford and the bank. He had confidence in himself now, and he held grimly on to it like a feist dog. And when the depression lifted and money was easy again he cut it up into building lots, sold them off, and made a killing. After this there was no stopping him.

As for Baby—well, she is completely changed. And as everybody knows she now idolizes Bernie and can't do enough for him. She brings him his slippers at night, she fixes his

oatmeal in the morning. She mothers him and waits on him as if he were her child. And he takes it all with never a word and never a sign as far as anybody can tell as to how he feels about her.

And the dollars keep rolling in on Bernie. Everything he touches flourishes, and he has his hand into a dozen businesses. The next time you come into our town you'll like as not see a big sign by the roadside lighted up with neon lights and it will tell that Bernie is now also in the automobile business.

And in spite of all his business success, his fine new home and his better clothes, Bernie remains pretty much the same fellow he always was. He still speaks in his halting awkward way and goes with slightly bent shoulders, his face still pale and freckled and his blue eyes dull as ever they were.

But he doesn't smile any more, the way he used to do in his more humble days.

Chair Endowed

ONE WARM WINTER EVENING MABEL HARgrave was sitting in her rocking chair before the dead fireplace of her poor mill home, rocking back and forth, forth and back. And as she rocked, she talked. And as she talked she tossed her head about like one on the point of hysteria.

Mabel was an over-heavy, dropsical woman of about thirty-five. And there she sat with her pudgy shapeless legs straddled wide apart and a loose dirty wrapper billowing down over her swollen form.

In the corner of the ill-kempt and smelly room was a sagging iron bed with broken casters on which a man was lying stretched out asleep. At the rear of the room was an open door, and beyond the door came now and then the sound of children quarreling and crying.

"I keep telling you to get up and eat your supper, Bud, get up and eat your supper. I keep telling you," Mabel said as she went on rocking. "It's cold, cold. The coffee's cold. I can't keep it hot all night."

She shook her head and tickled her forehead nervously with her fingers. The sleeper's snores died away a moment.

"Why don't you answer me?" she said. "Wake up, wake up." And then outdone, she sent her voice up into a shriller, higher note. "Oh, you worry me to death. You worry me slam to death." She gestured spasmodically toward the rear room. "You and the children worry me to death. Listen at 'em, listen at 'em."

She called out loudly, "You children get quiet! You're driving me distracted. Get quiet I tell you. Oh, Bud, get up, get up, won't you."

She waved both her hands across her face now. "I can't stand much more of it all, Bud, I can't, I tell you." Her voice took on a piteous pleading quality, childlike almost, girlish and frightened. "I don't believe I'll live through it this time, Bud, honest, I think it'll kill me off. I got terrible pains in my back and legs. And they get worse, worse."

Her rocking chair kept on and on, back and forth, forth and back, never slackening its pace, never changing its rhythm. And her words poured on, keeping accompaniment to the rocking, and the rocking keeping accompaniment to the words. "It's a month till my time and I can't stand it, I can't."

Again she tickled her forehead with her fingers. The recumbent Bud shook and rattled the bed as he turned over.

"Oh, yes, yes, yes. I know what you mean, turning and a-twisting that-away. Be quiet, you're saying, be quiet. I know you want me to keep quiet. But I can't—I can't. It scares me, Bud, scares me to fits to think of it." She wagged her head and twisted her shoulders as she continued to rock.

"The doctor said not to have another one. You better not have another baby, he said. He told you too, Bud. He warned you. He said you'll have to be careful. Let her alone, he said.

"Yes, yes, be quiet, quiet. I wish everything could be quiet. Oh, Lord, there they go again!"

A sudden dull bump in the room at the rear was now followed by a child's screaming.

"Stop it, stop it!" Mabel yelled out shrilly. "If you don't stop that cutting up, I'll come in there and beat the stuffing out'n you, come in there weak as I am and down low in my pain and suffering."

But the clamor in the rear room kept on.

"Henry, you Henry, Hen—er—ee!" she cried. "Help Flossie back into that bed! Go to sleep, you children. Oh, go to sleep, I tell you."

A little boy dressed in ragged underclothes stuck his head in through the door at the rear.

"Ma," he said, as he dragged the sleeve of his old union suit across his stuffy, dripping nose, "Jimmy kicked Flossie in the face and knocked her off'n the bed."

Mabel waved her hands before her again. "Don't you come to me with no tales!" she shouted. She jerked her head in the direction of the rear room and yelled. "Jimmy, if you touch that girl again I'll come in there and blister your behind!"

The little boy standing in the door began to whimper. "I tried to get him to quit it and he pinched me, Ma."

Mabel turned on him wrathfully, still rocking away.

"Get back into that bed, Henry, get back into that bed, I say. You're just like your old Granddaddy Hargrave. Anybody crook a finger at him, and he'd swell up and boohoo with hurt feelings."

"I want me some water," the little boy blubbered.

From the rear came a chorus of cries. "We want some water, Ma. We want some water."

And Mabel answered loudly back. "I reckon you do. Sure you want water. Don't want a thing but to be up out of that bed. Get back into that bed, I said. Go to sleep every one of you, go to sleep."

The bed shook again suddenly as the man in it turned over

once more, muttering and smacking his lips sleepily to himself.

The little boy standing in the door pointed a crooked forefinger somewhat timidly and uncertainly toward the bed.

"He's about to wake up, Ma," he said in a low voice.

"Yeh, and you'd better be back in bed when he does wake up," said Mabel. "You heard me."

The little boy stood looking at her a moment as she rocked and rocked. Then he turned and quietly went over across the room to a bucket in a corner and gulped down a dipperful of water. He took the empty dipper from his lips and sucked in lungsful of air.

"Them old herrings make me near 'bout perish for water," he said.

The children called out from the rear room—"We want some water."

The little boy got another dipper of water from the bucket and started drinking. Mabel cried out. "Look at him drinking his head off. He'll be sick. No, he won't be sick. He'll wet the bed and then wake up in the night lying in a puddle and crying in the middle of it. Lordy mercy, look at him. He's tore his drawers all to pieces."

The little boy put the dipper back into the bucket and pulled his underclothes together where a big patch had been torn down from the rear. "Walter got hold of it and tore it out, Ma."

"You Walter," said Mabel as she rocked, "I'll get a switch to your back in the morning and burn you up, see if I don't."

"Henry's had some water, we want some," called the children from the rear room.

"Take the bucket in there and fill 'em up," said Mabel. And then she screamed out—"And the first one of you wets his bed tonight'll get wore to a frazzle. I tell you, I'll whip him, you hear me."

The little boy took the bucket, and holding it by the handle with both hands in front of him, he carried it into the rear room. Mabel skewed her rocking chair about a bit and went on talking to the man on the bed as she rocked.

"You better get up from there, Bud. How many times I got to tell you? You better get up from there and go in there and tend to them children. I can't do it, Bud, I can't get out of this chair. I'm getting too heavy to move about." She tickled her forehead again. "I ought to be in the bed. I ought to be in the bed there where you are, Bud." She wagged her shoulders again and dragged the palm of her pudgy hand across her damp forehead. "Suppose it's twins this time, Bud, suppose it is. God, Oh Lord God!"

A child's voice came loudly out of the back room—"Jimmy won't let me have no water." Then a loud wailing and kicking set up in there.

Suddenly the bed springs creaked, the bed rattled and Bud bounded up from it and stood in the room.

"Who in the hell could sleep," he snapped. "Who in the hell could sleep in such a furse!" He was a little unshaven man about forty years old with a quick darting glance and a mighty voice. He had been drinking, and his eyes were puffy and swollen. He had hardly got his words out before Mabel had joined in bitter reply.

"I can't help the furse," she said, "I can't help it."

"No, you can't help it," he snarled. "You always say you never can't help it."

"Well, I can't," she shrilled.

"That's what I said." He turned and shouted toward the rear room. "Stop that racket in there."

"Jimmy and Walter've been fighting," Mabel said. "They're all the time fighting or doing something." She shook her head. "Or doing something."

Bud charged toward the open rear door and went in, calling

loudly and warningly as he went, "Dry up, dry up I tell you." A few plops and loud smacks with his hand followed, and then the consequent squealing and sobbing of the children.

Mabel called out in fierce lamentation. "Stop it, Bud. You'll kill 'em. Stop beating 'em."

Bud came in hitching up his overalls. "Now I reckon by God they'll be quiet." He growled behind him, "Be quiet I tell you." He stopped and stood listening, "Hear me?" The children's sobs gradually died away. Bud pulled the door closed and came over toward a little table in the middle of the room where some dirty dishes and the scattered remnants of supper remained. He stood eyeing the table distastefully. "You all done had supper?" he queried morosely as he belched from deep in his belly.

"We waited and waited," Mabel said. "The children were hungry. They had to eat. I called you and kept a-calling."

"I reckon I heard you," Bud muttered. "And I reckon they heard you all down the street. God-Amighty, I never saw such a house—such a woman."

"I can't help it," Mabel said. "I can't help it."

"Oh, no, you can't help it."

Mabel quickened her pace and threw her hands faster before her. She was almost sobbing now. "I don't see why you blame me with everything, Bud, I don't see why."

"Lord God, I don't blame you for everything."

"I don't see why you treat me so," she said with shaking shoulders.

"Starting it up again, hunh, blaming me." He slouched down at the table and began to eat. Suddenly he stopped and ground the knob of his fist against his forehead. "Hah. This son-of-a-bitching neuralgia, feels like my head'll bust."

"If you'd quit that mean liquor—"

"Yeh, liquor. Who wouldn't drink? What other fun do I get, nohow—Where's the coffee?"

"On the stove," she said. "You'll have to get it yourself, Bud. I ain't able to get up and wait on you."

"Yeh, and I've heard that before," he answered brutally. Then he went on mockingly, "Rock, rock, rock. You wear yourself out in that rocking chair." He got up and stumbled across the room to the stove and fetched the coffeepot back to the table. He poured himself several cupfuls, drank them down and then flung the pot away from him with an oath. "You call that coffee. Damn dishwater."

"I don't know, oh, I don't know," Mabel said. "It tasted all right to me. The children made no complaint. They liked it." She wove her head about. "I don't know. It may be bad, I don't know. My taste is gone from me. Everything tastes alike to me. I feel like I got glue in my mouth all the time."

Bud stood in the floor eyeing her. "I wish to God you'd quit that rocking—rock, rock, rock. When I leave in the morning you're rocking and when I come home at night you're at it —rock, rock, rock." He yelled, "Stop it!" She stopped for an instant and then began again as her words began.

"Don't pick on me this evening, Bud," she whimpered. "I feel bad—sorta bad, Bud. After what happened a while ago."

"Shut up."

"When you come home this evening feeling so good—that's what I mean. You hadn't ought to a-done me the way you done. I didn't want you to take me in the room there and do me like that. I ain't able to stand it. It's wrong for you to want to do me like that—in my condition."

"Hush up, I tell you." Bud sat down and laid his face over on his arms on the table.

"And the children all around the house," Mabel went on. "And I've heard 'em laughing and a-snickering at us before. They're young and little, but they know a lot of things, Bud. I told you not to do it. I told you not to. And I seen little Walter peeping in at the window onct."

"What the hell do I care?" he muttered.

"I reckon you don't care. But you ought to. It's going to kill me." She shook her head and tickled her forehead once more. "All this trouble's going to kill me."

Bud mocked at her—"Yes, kill me, kill me."

Mabel cried out fiercely now—"I wisht we was out of this town. I don't like the factory. I've never liked being at the factory. I want to be back on the farm again where pigs and cows are."

"Oh, yes you do."

"I do, I tell you, I do."

"That's what I said. We were on a farm two years ago. But we didn't make nothing. You can't make nothing farming and you a poor God-damned snotty-nosed tenant. God Almighty runs the weather and the landlord runs the books and between them the tenant gets nothing, nothing, I tell you." He raised his head and banged the table with his fist. Then he put his arms back and laid his face on them again.

"I liked it better there."

"Yes you did and who the hell was it always talking about it being so lonesome there. You was. I tried both of 'em—factory and farming. None of 'em don't suit you, nothing suits you."

"Yes they do, Bud." Mabel's voice was softer now, more plaintive and whining.

"I wisht to God I knowed what it was," he continued. "I been married to you ten years and we been running back and forward from the town to the country, from the country to the town and we ain't a bit better off today than the day we started." He raised his head and suddenly shouted again. "God-damn it, not half as good! If we paid what we owed we'd be naked as yard dogs." He flung out his hand knocking over a cup. "Here we are with a houseful of young'uns and nothing to feed 'em with. No, nothing don't suit you. You

won't be suited in heaven. Heaven," he cackled satirically, "heaven—you'll hit hell bottom like a shot of lead. All of us will."

Mabel began to whine and whimper as the pace of her rocking increased. "Oh, yes, cuss and complain. Complain and cuss. But you can't get out of it that way. It's your fault and you know it and it ain't my fault."

Bud's satiric laughter shattered the air. "Hah, hah, hah."

"Other men provide for their families."

"Yes, they do and they've got somebody to help 'em."

"Well I help what I can."

"And what sort of help is it? Christ, Christ, what sort of help."

"I keep the house and cook for you. I reckon I do that."

"Sure to God you do. And look at it. And look at this table and these dishes. Look at this room. No window curtains, no carpet, no nothing. Other women can take scraps and leftovers and fix up things and make 'em look nice. Hah, and the damn bed so full of chinches the children can't sleep at night." He mocked at her savagely. "I can't help it, I can't help it. And look at you in that dirty wrapper. You stink, you're rotten." He gripped his head in his hands. "Wash yourself, clean up, do something."

Mabel's voice soared up high and heartbrokenly as she beat her hands together and as the rocking chair went on. "You made me like that. You killed all the heart in me. It's your fault."

"Hah."

"Oh, I reckon you did. You've drug me to death. I ain't got no power to fight no more." Her words came from her sobbingly. "I'm tired, tired all the time and sick all the time."

Bud whirled his chair around and sat with his back to her. "Cry, cry, what the hell do I care."

"Oh, you don't care." For a moment she rocked in silence

except for the wunk, wunk of the chair. When she spoke again her voice was calmer, colder, more superior.

"I got something I want to show you, Bud Hargrave. I been thinking about it all day. I want to show it to you."

"I don't want to see it," he said.

"I reckon you don't." She pulled a small photograph out of her bosom. "I been carrying it around. I want to show it to you. I said to myself, this evening right after you done me like you did there on the bed—I can't stand this no more and I'm going to show it to him and he'll see what he's brung me to. It'll crucify his soul in him if he's got a soul left." She held the photograph out to him, but he reached over and knocked her hand away.

"I don't want to see it, and I reckon I got a soul," he said.

"It's a pitchure of you and me that Walter Maynard took with his kodak one Sunday." She held it before her and stared at it. "You got hold of my hand and I'm looking at you a-smiling. What a fool I was. I found it in the bottom of the trunk with the new baby's clothes."

"What a fool *I* was."

"Walter Maynard was a-liking me then too. That's why I named little Walter after him."

"I wisht to God he'd a-married you."

"Look at him now," she lamented. "He married a fine school-teaching woman and he's got a farm. A big farm it is, and he's going to send his children to the University, and here we are working in a cotton mill and starving to death, starving, I tell you, Bud Hargrave."

"Starve then!" he shouted. "I do what I can. I do what I can. Every day I work. Rain or shine, well or sick, all the time I work, work, work, work." His voice rose into a chant. "But it don't do no good. Too many mouths to feed. Too many mouths to feed. And nobody to help me." He thrashed his arms about. "I'm sick too. I'm tired." He sprang up,

leaning toward her, his hands on his knees. He leered at her. "Young'uns, young'uns, too many young'uns, a house full of 'em." He flung up his hands and clasped his head again. "Married ten years and eight young'uns and another one coming. No, it ain't your fault. I might as well married a rabbit. I can't even touch you that you don't get bigged and come around in a month or two and tell me another baby's coming."

Mabel continued to sit looking at the photograph as if not listening. Her rocking had stopped. Bud stared at her with bloodshot eyes. Her voice rose into a sort of musing croon.

"Nobody would know that's me, such a sweet girl. I remember that day same as yesterday. The weather was fair and there were little pink tumbling clouds in the sky. And we were standing by the rose bush in the corner of the yard when it was took. I've got on that fine lawn waist I made the day before. Soft as feathers it was. And it felt so sweet on my arms. Ma ruffled it under the presser foot and all the time she was sewing away we were talking about you. And I was telling her about your brown eyes." She shivered. "Telling her about Bud Hargrave's brown eyes."

Bud turned to his chair and sat down, not listening. His voice rose up in its own monologue of self-interest and sorrow. "And nobody to help me. Day after day a-beaming in the God-damned factory—six days of it to the week. And today the bossman gimme hell. The yarns kept a-tangling. I couldn't help it. The bossman gimme hell. He said, you used to be the best beamer around, Bud. What's got into you, what's got wrong? I didn't say nothing, I couldn't say nothing. I couldn't say my wife made the yarns tangle, Mr. Webb. It's my wife keeps a-messing up the pattern. I couldn't say that. He'd a-laughed at me."

Mabel's rocking chair began going again. She gasped out

her angry reply. "Oh, yes, you could say it. Blame it on me. It won't matter in a little while. I'll be dead. I'll be dead, I tell you. It's a-killing me."

"Hah," said Bud, glaring at her. "Stop that rocking, can't you." He peered over at her a little straightly. "What makes you do your hands so funny and keep feeling your forehead that a-way."

Mabel wove her head back and forth in the air. "My head feels funny. It's like a piece of wood. For a week it's been that way. There's a diddling inside my skull and specks keep swimming before my eyes." Her voice rose to a moaning cry. "It scares me, it scares me to death sometimes."

"O-ho!"

"Yes, Bud, and I'm afraid, Bud. I'm afraid of the house and everything around me." Her words broke out in a cry of fright. "Yestiddy I thought the ceiling would mash me."

"My, gracious, did you," sneered Bud. "And what a squash that would have been."

"There's something wrong inside my head," said Mabel, and she resumed the tickling motions of her forehead. "Last night I woke up and I heard the children crying. They were all asleep, but I heard 'em crying, way deep in my head. Jimmy and Walter and Mary, all of 'em crying inside my head."

She began rocking more swiftly. "The doctor gave me some medicine to take, but it's all gone and I can't buy no more. The drugstore won't charge it." She turned on him piteously. "Just half of what you spend on that liquor would help me, it would help me a whole lot, quiet down my nerves, make me sleep, but—"

Bud lashed back at her. "Oh, it's like you, it is, to want me to give that up too. It's the only pleasure I get in this world and I'm going to have it." He rose out of his chair once more and began striding up and down the room. The

children beyond the door were now murmuring and whimpering in fright. But neither Mabel nor Bud paid any attention to them now. "Yeah, by God," he went on, "in the morning at five o'clock the old whistle'll blow me out of bed and I got to rise and go. You and the young'uns can sleep, but I got to go." His voice broke in a half sob. "I ain't nothing but a slave. Talking about the niggers being in slavery. I'm worse'n a nigger. All of us is slaves, all the mill folks is slaves." He brandished his hands about. "The Goddamn mill owners ride around in their big cars and their sons and daughters waste and strew the money I help to make—on parties, fishing trips, and finery and plat'num jewels. And they look down on me, look down on you and me and all of us like dogs. I hope every last son-of-a-bitchin' one of 'em rots in hell. I do!" He waggled his hands above his head, clenched them in two tight fists and let them fall by his side. "And in this morning's paper it tells about the big boss of these mills and how he has endowed a chair of history at the University. What kind of a chair is a chair of history. Hah, hah, not like that rocking chair—or is it? Rock, rock, rock," he whined. "Stop it, for God's sake stop it."

The children, frightened, set up a loud squalling in the rear room. Bud snatched open the door and tore in to quiet them. He pulled off his leather belt as he went, and like caged squirrels the little folks began whirling about the room before him as he struck at them.

"I'll beat hell out of you, I tell you, get in that bed. Get back in that bed."

"Don't hurt 'em, Bud, don't hurt 'em," Mabel cried out, as she kept on rocking. "Don't you hurt them babies, Bud Hargrave!" she shrieked. "Don't you hurt 'em!"

She tickled her forehead and went on pouring a flood of words in Bud's direction.

I Call My Jesus

IN THE BRIGHT GLARE OF A FIERCE AUGUST day six striped convicts were digging on a blazing road, swinging their picks aloft and bringing them down. Four other convicts came behind these six, piling out the dirt with shovels. The white dust hid the blackberries in the hedge, and the willow clumps were bent under its weight. The cauldron heat of the day shimmered across the land as far as the eye could see. Lazy Lawrence danced his fiendish dance. The sweat poured down. It was the only dampness in the world for the ten mourners on the road.

On a stump to the left a guard squatted, drowsy, vapid like a toad. The rifle in the crook of his arm kept alert. Its muzzle warned like an eye. It threatened.

Fall picks, and heave arms!

On the bankside to the right another guard sat. He also was sleepy, drowsy. His rifle also kept alert and watched, its muzzle threatened.

The convicts dug with their backs to the guards, their faces set down the stretch of road that disappeared in a point up the hill ahead. Like so many puppets they lifted their hands toward the sky and brought them down—never any slower,

never any faster. And as the picks struck against the earth with a thud, a husky desperate groan burst from their baked lips—hanh. As rhythmic as the beating of their own hearts this "hanh" accompanied the falling of the picks, carrying over long maddening hours of pain until the sun sank cooling in the west and the guards stirred and croaked, "Call it a day."

At times their voices were raised in a chant, level, patient, eternal and as tough as the earth in which they dug. Sometimes they talked as they worked, but not so often, for the staccato of conversation broke up the rhythmic routine of labor. And that's what they were there for—labor, labor, working on the road—the road that led up yonder far hill to where the University rested and waited.

Three years on the roads, Tom Sterling, alias Red Murdock. And two years for you, Bantam Wilson. The judge dropped his tobacco by his foot, rose, and gave sentence. Gentlemen of the jury—"These niggers, these everlasting niggers, always fighting, always shooting. They've got no sense, they'll never have no sense. Obedience, peace, peace. The law, the law. For this is the republic, these the institooshuns. Land of our fathers. Let this be a lesson."

Dig, dig, dig! Side by side they dug—Bantam Wilson and Tom Sterling. Misery made them friends. Sorrow gave them understanding—silent and wordless the understanding. But Bantam's crowing spirit still walked unbroken. Sterling's had gone under. The feel of iron and abuse of tongues had broken him. His great shoulders were bent, his legs hardly sustained his weight, and his arms flung up the pick and let it fall hour after hour, day after day with slowly decreasing power. And all the while his lightless face was bent above the muted earth.

These are the children, hanh. These are the brethren marching to Canaan Land.

The guard on the right stirred in his sleepiness and beat at the flies with his hat.

"Rain or shine, the old dog flies stay with you," he said.

The second guard lighted a cigarette and passed the package on to the first. "And the damned muskeeters allus drilling for water," he said.

"Heigh you, Sterling, raise up that pick and let her come down," the first guard called. And the convicts dug on, accompanying every blow with their everlasting "hanh," saying never a word. "You hear me, I say, putt some pep in that digging."

After a moment the tougher Bantam called out of the side of his mouth without looking around, his pick still going, "He sick. Ain't able to work."

"You bastard monkey runt, who's talking to you?" snapped the first guard.

"Hell'll be froze over 'fore you get this little digging done," said the second guard.

"That's right," said the first guard, "let the road grow—bricks and mortar and rivers of iron, let it flow on."

And the two keepers of the law drowsed into silence.

The second guard presently stretched his arm in a yawn. "Lord, I'm sleepy—sleepy," he said.

"You better leave her off a few nights," the first guard snickered. And now likewise the convicts with the shovels burst into a snicker.

The second guard's voice was suddenly brutal and knifed with hate, "Somebody's begging for the little rawhide."

The four convicts, terrified, pushed their shovels into the loose earth and piled it out.

"I want me some water," said the first guard swabbing his neck with a dirty handkerchief.

"Yeh, the Goddamn water-boy's fell in and drowned," said the second guard. He stood up and called loudly across the land, "Water-boy, water-jack—could a-been there and half-way back!" He stood mopping his beaded forehead.

"Maybe he's gone on up there and entered college."

"Maybe he has. Education."

"Yeh, education." They both chuckled.

The diggers began a low working chant, pitiful and pleading. Mercy, mercy, it called. Water, water, give us some water. Where is it, where is he? Where is the great I Am, the Almighty God? Listen now while us gi' you the call. Eigh, Lord come with the 'sponse—

> "I call my people—hanh,
> I said my people—hanh,
> I mean my people—hanh,
> Eigh, Lord!"

"That's right. Sing him out'n the bushes," said the first guard.

"Sing him back from college," said the second.

"Sing."

"If it ain't water it's grub," said the first guard.

"And if it ain't that it's something else," said the second. "Bear down on them picks! Jesus Christ!"

Sterling suddenly tumbled over and fell with his face flat in the dust. A convulsive shudder seemed to run through the other convicts. But they carried on their digging, never any slower, never any faster—

> "I call my friends—hanh,
> I said my friends—hanh,
> I mean my friends—hanh,
> Eigh, Lord!"

The first guard sprang up. "Heigh now, none of that, none of that," he said.

Bantam's voice rose in a whine. "He sick, bad sick."

"Better got cured 'fore he come here then," said the first guard. He marched up to the prostrate body. "Get that mouth

out'n the dirt." He whirled toward Bantam. "Nobody asked for your jowing. Want the little cat tails?"

"Jesus, Jesus," choked Bantam, slinging his pick faster.

"Snap out'n it, Sterling," said the first guard.

The second guard got a leather thong from his coat. "Put a fire coal on his tail and rise him," he said.

"Gonna step to it, Sterling?" queried the first guard. But Sterling made no answer. "He's a stall boy, hell he's stalling."

"Damn right he's stalling," said the second guard.

"This ain't no party," said the first guard.

"Hell, it ain't no party," said the second. He smoothed the thong with his hand and looked at the first guard.

"Make 'em work, make 'em work, that's right."

"Work, work—that's what they're here for, work."

The second guard raised the strap above his head, "Thirty-nine, thirty-nine," he said, his voice coming out stronger now. "The law, the law." But still he held the leather poised without bringing it down. A low murmur of horror rose among the convicts, burgeoning its passion into their chant, full of hate now, full of begging but hopeless withal—

"I call my sister—hanh,
I said my sister—hanh,
I mean my sister—hanh,
Eigh, Lord!"

"Hold her a minute—we'll see, we'll see," said the first guard. He went up to Sterling and poked him gently in the ribs with the muzzle of his rifle, but only the twitching back made answer.

"Try him in the collar," said the second. He cuffed him gently in the collar, then with more insistence. At last with vehement roughness. A low whine was heard. "He's saying something."

"Goddammit, we'll see," said the first guard, bending down.

"And what song is he singing now?" queried the second.

"Don't say nothing, moans and whines. He don't say nothing," said the first.

"By God we'll see! Oh yes, he'll talk, he'll tell us a mouthful," said the second.

The convicts' working chant grew fuller, the rhythm began to shape the picks, to hold the rising and falling arms to their labor. The cry for help, for peace, grew stronger. And with it the baffled will, the confused soul sent forth its cry—

"I call my brother—hanh,
I said my brother—hanh,
I mean my brother—hanh,
Eigh, Lord!"

"Let him have it," said the first guard. He reached his hand for the rifle of the second who looked around the world as if for a witness of justification. Suddenly the second guard began to beat the prostrate figure. Again a shudder and the gust of a groan swept the convicts. They drove their picks deeper into the gound, but never any faster, never any slower—

"I call my mother—hanh,
I said my mother—hanh,
I mean my mother—hanh—"

"Six, seven, eight, nine, ten," counted the second guard. "And now you'll work."

"And I reckon he'll work," said the first guard. "Eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen."

And the watchers in the skies cried blood, blood—earth, earth, sweet earth, receive it—keep it, save it, till the next harvest.

"Oh yes, he'll work and I reckon he'll work," crooned the first guard.

The water-boy burst through the hedge at the left, stood terror-stricken a moment, and then dropping his bucket with a clatter, tore down the road. The precious water sank into the dried earth. Now the toilers chanted in hopelessness, and the four with shovels wagged their heads, their parched tongues protruding through baked lips. Ah, hope is no more, life is no more—death—death all around us. Grave, grave, swallow us up, hide us away, keep us.

Fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, fell the blows of the second guard.

Now Tom Sterling had reached the end in a last burst of life. He staggered to his feet, his eyes glazed with madness.

"Go to work," said the first guard. Then he shouted, "Look out!"

The second guard turned to grab his rifle, but Sterling was upon him. He struck him in the face with his great frantic hammer fists and beat him to the earth, crushing the stems of the weighted goldenrod by the ditch and tearing the clumps of knotted lady-fingers.

Sterling's voice came out in a great animal scream—hah, hah, hah. He beat the guard's upturned face with his fists.

"Kill him, kill him!" shrieked the fallen guard.

The convicts sang on. Now their chant rose louder, fresher. Revenge, revenge. Hope is not perished from us. Our arms are still strong.

> "I call my father—hanh,
> I said my father—hanh,
> I mean my father—hanh,
> Eigh, Lord!"

"Kill him, kill him!" the second guard screamed.

The first guard stood stupefied. Then as if suddenly awakening, he stepped back, raised his rifle and shot Sterling through

the back. The Negro rolled over and lay with his face upturned in the burning sun.

The second guard crawled across to the bank and lay stretched out in the grass, his body heaving and jerking with angry strident sobs. The first guard stood looking foolishly down at the body. The four convicts had dropped their shovels and now stood hovering together in a shuddering group. But the six sang on, beaten—darkness, night—Bantam Wilson leading the way—the picks ever lifting and falling.

God sits high in heaven, his face from the Negro, his hand toward the white man. The poor and needy do cry in vain. The iron palings hold them, hanh. The steel and the iron divide them.

"The Goddamned fool, he's dead, dead!" spluttered the first guard.

The second guard sat up with a high laugh and wiped the blood from his face. "Had to kill him, we had to kill him, had to kill," he said. He peered forward, "Dead as a fly." And he began moaning, "They's something wrong, something wrong here."

"Sing, you bastards. Dig, you sons of bitches," said the first guard, raising his rifle high.

And the body lay still. Once it knew swiftness, legs that ran by the cabin, played in the cornfields, eyes that knew starlight, knew moonlight, tongue that knew singing. As they said in the song, and I lay this body down.

In the cool hedge, the fly said zoom, and a buzzard wheeled by the flat disc of the sun. Bide high there on thy roosting place—close by the throne of God.

And they dug and they sang—

"I call my Jesus—hanh,
I said my Jesus—hanh,
I mean my Jesus—hanh,
Eigh, Lord!"

How Grandma Found Her Love

YEH, CHILE.

Lak a whisper, lak a breath, as suddent as death love kin come to you. Somep'n knocks mebbe on the do' of yo' heart and say, Lemme in, and you never know when it's gwine knock and when it's not gwine knock. So 'twas the fust time I ever slapped these two eyes on yo' grandpappy.

I'll never forgit the day it happened nuther. What a day! August time it was, and a Friday. A big hanging was being held over there in Montboro, and I mean big. Everybody for miles around was up long 'fore the crack of daybreak gitting primped and dollied and fixed to go to that there spectacle. Oh that day! And people, people, white and colored, everywhere! That was the biggest crowd of human beings gathered together I'd ever seen in all my born days. From every direction they come. From the north and the east and the south and the west—in steer cyarts, in road cyarts, in wagons and in carriages. And the thoo train from the south and the north stopped and unloaded their mergins of folks.

And the University itself give out of schooling that day, 'cazen all the students and 'fessors mostly had made off over there to see the hanging.

It sho' is a curious thing about the human race, chile, curious. Why folks lak to congergate same as flies around dead things—where ruction and trouble is—is mo'n I kin tell. But they do so now and they still done so then. Mebbe the sight of grief and pain suffered by others does somep'n to human hearts—makes somep'n happen to our souls even. And this weren't jes one hanging, with suffering in it. It was three hangings. Three po' sinful men was to be hung by the neck till dead—and the Lord have mercy on yo' po' souls, the jedge had said.

I knowed all three of 'em. Leastwise I had recognizance of 'em. Two of 'em was white folks and one of 'em was a po' colored man. There was Mr. Harris and Mr. Johnson. They was the white men, and as full of sin and weekedness as a copperhead snake is full of green pizen. And then there was Louis Colton. He was the colored one. Po' Louis. Sorrow and woeful was the day he mixed hisself up with them 'ere white folks. They was gamblers and drunkards and pistol-toters—robbers and thieves, they was. And when Louis j'ined up with 'em he putt hisself in their power, everybody said so. And he allus done whatever they told him to do. Sam Ragland was in it lakwise. He was a nigger but they let him loose 'cazen he turnt what they called state's evidence.

Yeh, chile, turble, turble it was. But the Good Book do say, verily, verily a man shall reap what he sows. And all them men sowed trouble and death and they reaped the same in the vineyard of Almighty God. You heared me say many a time, chile, if you run with the dogs you'll lakly scratch fleas. And you heared me say too when yo' house is afire it's too late to dig a well to git water to putt it out.

Our whole family was all set to go and see the dreadful happening. Up early and breakfast cooked, we soon was dressed out in our best bib and tucker, Ma and Pa and the two little boys and us girls. They was a whole carpetful of

chillun in our house. I was the oldest girl in the family and had to keep a lookout foh the little uns. But I'm here to tell you as soon as ever us got in the grip of that occasion they fo'got all 'bout me and was scattered and gone and I fo'got all 'bout them too. They lef' me same as chickens leaves a duck mother that goes swimming in the water in front of their eyes. But later on in the day us all got 'sembled back to the wagon and no damage done to any of 'em. And in the meanwhile time love done blossomed in my heart.

The roads was mighty miry and awful then, not lak they is now, all hard-suffaced up and smooth as a' otter's slide. And long 'fore we come to Eno River near the edge of the town the sun was a big blazing bird in the sky and it was 'way on in the morning. Pa whupped up the mule 'caze he felt us was already late. We crossed over the bridge and bruised on in a jiffy to'ads the jailhouse on the right hand there.

And what was the very first sight I did see? Well, it was a big-eyed face looking out the window, and it weren't nobody's face but po' Louis Colton's. And it was all flaring and ill-sick looking, it was. He seen us and he hollered out in a loud voice, "Hey there, you all. This here's Louis." And not knowing what I done I raised up my hand in a kind of greeting to the po' lost man. But my tongue wouldn't say nary a word. And he then hollered out mo' louder still and I kin hear the words he said even to this day—"This here's the day I'm to be hung, folkses. And I'm jest as clear of what they's hangin' me fo' as ever was Jesus Christ the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world."

My mammy grunted and spet a dip of snuff over the wagon into the road. She allus done that-a-way suddent and quick when she was riled.

"That's a' awful thing—fo' him to be telling lies lak that and he so clost to meeting his Maker," she said.

"I reckon lak as not Louis musta been reading the Good Book a lot—whilst he's shet up in there," said my father, "jedging from his words."

It made the plumb hair on my head quile up lak in hot ashes with the terror of what po' Louis said and the way his voice sounded and his po' face looked.

"Well," my mammy said, as she looked round and about at us chillun—"mark my word that a gap in the axe allus shows in the chips. And, chillun, listen to what I say—a minute may break what a' 'ternity of time kin never mend."

"That's raight," said my father, "and that's howcome us brung you over here—so ever' one of you kin learn a lesson—a lesson to go with you thoo life. And you needn't to worry 'bout Louis, you needn't cry no lost tears down fo' him. He was guilty. He's gotta suffer fo' it. He split that good white woman's haid open with a' axe."

"Amen," said my mammy, "and it was proved on him. And another thing he done done. Don't fo'git that," said my mammy.

"I don't," said my daddy. "Louis putt strychinine and arsenic in his wife's coffee, chillun, and he killed her too. But they never did convict him of that, though in certain ever'body knowed he done it."

"Sho' they did," said my mammy. "But when he come to killing that white woman—that 'fessor's wife and her finding him robbing her house—well, that's where he spill't the milk all over hisself."

"Didn't he though," said my daddy.

And now the people was swarming all up around the jail-house lak a gorm of bees. And my daddy drawed up clost by and let us git out, and he went off and hitched the mule to a tree in the jailhouse yard. And there us chillun all stood around in the push of people looking on with great big sorrowful eyes and waiting to see the prisoners brung out.

And soon here come the high shurff and his deppities in their big boots—*clonk-clonk,* and they carried their pistols in their hands. And they went in the jail and brung out the prisoners handcuffed. And the scattering dogs around 'gun to bark. The people stretched and craned and gaped to see it all. And they walked the three of 'em around in the yard, the three that was to die, to let 'em partake and taste of the sunshine and the sweet air fo' their last day on earth.

And any time now, chile, I close my eyes, I kin see their po' faces. And death was in 'em and their eyes was wide-rimmed and red. The white men had beards on their faces but behind it all you could see their skin was white as Sunday sheets. And po' Louis's eyes was smoky and hollow and turning in their sockets lak he couldn't help hisself. And his mouth stayed open all the time, same lak a man feeling vomit 'bout to come on. And he kept dripping and drooling, and ever' onct in a while he'd rise up his sleeve and wipe it away from his chin.

And oh, how my heart ached to see it all! And I squeezed little Eulalie's hand so hard she cried. And Ma pulled her away from me. "Quit hurting that chile," she said.

And then Mr. Harris stopped walking around and held up his two cuffed hands, and ever'body got silent the way you do in the churchyard when the preacher holds up his hand ready to start saying, "Ashes to ashes and dust to dust." And then that 'ere man he begun to preach loud and strong to all the people. He told 'em about his evil and weeked ways and how he'd repented of all his sins and how ever'body ort to take warning from what his life had turnt out to be—so that they might 'scape the wroth of God the Saviour and sech woe and turble damnation in the end of their days.

And whilst he went on a-talking a lot of people 'gun to cry lak at a revival meeting. And I cried myself. I couldn't he'p it. And later it was told that a number of folkses got

religion that day and led better lives hencefo'th. And one of 'em was old Hezekiah Faulkner. He was a low-down liquor-seller and sinful critter. It was said 'twas him that sold Louis the liquor reg'lar and he furnished the other white men with it. And no doubt the liquor had somep'n to do with their evil doings. Anyhow my daddy said old Hezekiah mought just as well git his hanging along with Louis and t'others. 'Caze Louis fo' a matter of fact was drunk on his liquor the ve'y night he kilt the good white woman.

But Hezekiah didn't git his grace there in front of the jailhouse. He was too tough fo' that. It was only when he saw later what happened up on the hill—when he saw the bodies hanging there—that the lesson writ in their death come home to him. Fo'ty years the preachers had been atter old Hezekiah and his moss-backed soul and couldn't fetch him. But that hanging reached him all right, and it reached into the souls of plenty t'others. Yeh, chile.

It was gitting mighty nigh on to'ads eating time now, and the middle of the day. Most ever'body had brung their mid-day snack but nobody weren't eating yit. The folkses was waiting fo' the hanging. And besides they all felt mighty sick and didn't have much appetite. Purty soon there come a wagon rattling up pulled along by a big stout fat mule and drove by a mop-headed white boy. And in that wagon was three coffins. The people drawed back from in front of it lak it had been a hearse or the horse of death itself come from Satan and the black beyond. The shurff and the deppities they tuk hold of the prisoners and holp 'em up into the wagon. And with the gyards walking along, the wagon started on up thoo the town to'ads Gallows Hill.

And whilst the wagon rolled along and all of us kep' following atter it, and the dogs too, there Mr. Harris stood up in it with one knee leaning on his own coffin to balance hisself, and he kep' on preaching. And po' Louis he broke

into a song, singing it all by hisself. And then the people 'gun to pick it up and they sung with him. I knowed that song the way a lot of other people done, and I've never fo'got it from that day to this un. And ever'time they sings it in the church I thinks 'bout that hanging. And when you hear it, chile, you think 'bout it too. Yeh, you better—

"The lightning flares, the thunders roll,
The earthquake shakes from pole to pole—
Oh, Jesus Christ, my living God,
Make up my dying bed."

And soon 'most all the folkses had j'ined in with the singing. But my daddy and my mammy they didn't sing. They was strong hard-shell folks. And up thoo the town we all marched.

"The rocks and hills melt with the sun
And man and all his works is done."

And the wheels kep' knocking under the weight of the men loaded in that wagon, knocking lak in time to that song. And rocking in my chair many a time since I've heared it knock, knock in my 'membrance still. And finally us mounted up to Gallows Hill on the north edge of the town. And there the scaffold was already built with new boa'ds and scantling and three new looped ropes hanging down, waiting all in a row. The boy stopped the wagon by the scaffold, and the shurff and the gyards holp the prisoners out and led 'em up the little steps. The three of 'em stood there and the shurff tuk the handcuffs off'n 'em whilst the gyards helt their arms, and then he tied their hands behind 'em. And all the while each one was looking thoo the noose that was right in front of his face. And they was all as meek as little chillun.

Then the big white preacher, Reverend A. C. Dixon he was, mounted up the steps to preach. You've heared me tell

'bout him, chile. He later went 'way crost the ocean water to preach befo' the king. Well, Reverend Dixon mounted up on the scaffold, and he putt his hand gentle on each of the men. And he kep' his hand longest on Louis' shoulder, lak maybe he felt more sorry for him. Then he turnt 'round, opened up his Bible and tuk his text—"When I would do good, evil is present with me."

Mo'n a' hour he preached to the multitude and he carried two rows at a time on how pride goeth befo' destruction and a haughty sperit befo' a fall, and in such an hour as ye know not the Son of Man cometh. Yeh, he said, be sho' a man's sins will find you out and there ain't no hiding place from the wide watching eye of God.

And ever'body in that vast throng of people hung on his words, drinking of 'em in. But the po' prisoner criminals kep' standing there, twisting 'bout ever' now and then on their t'ahed feets same lak they wished he'd hesh and git it over and done with.

And when finally the sermont was finished, the preacher led in a long prayer. And all over the hillsides and up in the trees people set and stood. Their heads was bowed lak weeping willow trees. Then at the end of the prayer, Reverend Dixon said, "Our Father who art in heaven," and the hundreds and thousands of people, white and black, j'ined in jest lak chillun in the church on Sunday. And the po' fellows on the scaffold standing there with their heads bowed, they done so too and so done the shurff and the gyards. Clean 'crost the town and out into the country rolled the great chanting voices of sound, saying, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, fo' thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, fo'ever and ever, Amen."

Ever'body in that vast mighty multitude was feeling sorrowful and fo'giving now. My own heart ached lak it couldn't stand but a little bit mo', and I could jest feel that

ever'body else's heart was aching and filled with sorrow too. And so much sorrow was ever'where that forgiveness was in all our hearts. Kindness was in people's souls, one to another and 'specially so to'ads the po' condemnded ones about to die. And here and there and ever'where bawlings and sobbings 'gun breaking out 'mongst the people. Nobody felt lak hanging nobody now. Ever'body was sorry sich a' awful thing was to be. But still ever' last one of us knowed that the hanging must be. For the law said hang and the law, chile, take it from me, is a' all-powerful and fearsome thing. 'Member that.

The tears were pyore blinding my eyes and I turnt away from the sad sight on the scaffold. Then raight 'crost from me was a young colored man looking off, and there were some water drops on his cheeks also. I looked at him, and he looked around at me—in the dimness of our tears we seen one another, and my heart was aching so with grief I felt nigh to him a stranger, and I fully believed he felt clost to me likewise. I put my hankcher to my eyes to keep from boo-hooing.

So now I heared the great preacher saying a few low kind words to each of the prisoners. I couldn't understand what he was saying, but I knowed he was comforting of 'em. And in the midmost of it all Louis quick hollered out in a loud voice could be heared clean 'crost Eno River. "This day certain to my soul—I'm gwine be with Jesus in Paradise. Yea in the arms of my loving Saviour—that's where I'm gwine be this day!"

And from off'n the hillsides and from off'n the little slopes and gullies where the people was crowded, you could hear scattered amens and bless you, brother. And the dogs started barking again.

Next the shurff and the gyards stepped up and putt black caps on all three of 'em, and there they stood with them

black things on 'em looking lak three booger bears or something to scare daylights out'n you on Christmas night.

Whilst they was doing of this Reverend Dixon reached up his hands high and started a song, leading the people in a great hymn anthem. We sing it in our church still to this day.

"Who is this that comes from far
With his garments dipped in blood,
Stray triumphant traveler
Is he man or is he God?"

Then all of a suddent lak as if God the Saviour had made answer back, there come from deep underneath the earth to the west a shaking growl and rumble of bad thunder. People looked all about 'em, one at t'other. Seemed lak they was a sign in it or somep'n. Fo' we'd jest been singing when we'd come marching up the hill 'bout the thunder rolling from pole to pole.

The thunder putt a stop to the singing in the crowd. The preacher went on a few lines furder and then only him and Louis was singing. And then the preacher stopped, and only Louis was singing. The song coming out from under that black cap give ever'body the shivers, I tell you. The ropes was now putt 'round the necks of the three lost souls. The shurff putt up his hand in a sign, and raight spang at that moment the thunder crashed deep and scary once mo'. A trembling run all through the people and I could feel it. Ever'body could feel it, feel that there was something wrong with the happenings of this day. And it was lak the great voice of the Almighty from fur down under the earth speaking out against it.

And all the while ever'body was looking at the men on the scaffold. I can still see 'em standing a little knee-bent there. And I was thinking when the thunder sounded 'bout

that other old song we used to sing there in Mount Gilead Church.

"Day of wrath, oh day of mourning
See fulfilled the prophet's warning."

And I looked beyont the young colored stranger clost by to the trees 'way to the west and beyont the sycamores along Eno River and the chestnut oaks on top of Occoneechee Mountain. And I could see a great roll of thundering clouds coming on up over the world there lak the Jedgment Day itself.

A lump was in my throat and a kind of sick feeling in my stomach. And my mouth kept filling with spettle and I wanted to dump it out. But a girl wasn't supposed to spet. So I wiped my mouth with my sleeve just the way po' Louis had been doing.

And I looked back at the scaffold and I knowed Louis couldn't wipe his mouth now because his hands was tied behind him. And it didn't make no difference nohow, fo' the black cap was over his face now and mebbe that would soak it up like bread does gravy.

The shurff drapped his hand, and the gyard standing below on the ground and behint a plank handle reached out and pulled the handle easy with his hand. And the props flew out lak somep'n had hit 'em. Down fell the trap doors and the men shot thoo 'em same lak rocks you mought drap into the creek. And the preacher jumped back as if he was afeared he mought fall thoo too. I turnt my head away quick to keep from losing my breakfas'.

And at that very pime blank secont, the very secont the handle was pulled and the prisoners fell there come one of the awfulest ripping and tearing crashings of lightning down out'n the sky I'd ever experienced. People screamed and shouted and jumped and turnt around. And a great moan-

ing mumble went out over the multitude. And the dogs just about went wild—gwine away from there. And that lightning had struck a big oak tree jest over the brow of the hill, and smoke and bramstone could be seen gwine up the sky where it had struck.

Yeh, chile, it was jest lak mebbe old Moster that makes the heavens and the earth and holds 'em in the hollow of his hand—jest lak he'd done spoke with the thunderbolt of his own voice, saying, oh human race, oh human race, the shame and pity of what you's doing!

And the wiggling of the three men on the ropes 'gun to stop. I couldn't look at 'em but I knowed they was wiggling and I could hear the creakling of the scaffold, the creakling coming stiller and stiller. And I looked at the people whilst they gazed at the scaffold and I could read in the countenance of their face what was happening, 'specially the young stranger where he kept swallowing by his Adam's apple to keep from crying.

Then ever'thing got still as death. There was no movement, no noise from all the people, no sound in the air. There was no more lightning nor thunder now. After a minute or two a' easy little wind 'gun blowing lak a sort of blessing over the scene. A light easy wind 'twas. Then with a rush the rain come on—coming 'crost the land lak the trampling of a flock of goats. It struck the crowd in a great gust. And I could hear the drops plop-plopping on the scaffold planking and on the shirts of the three bodies hanging from their ropes. And all of a suddent I was hit by a worry 'bout 'em hanging there helpless and gitting wet, lak mebbe they'd ketch their death of cold. Jest for a second so I was.

Then the people seemed to wake up, the douse of cold rain falling on 'em woke 'em up and brung 'em back out'n the spell of all the turble happenings. And they started

scattering in all directions lak biddies befo' a hawk, 'fessors, students, everybody.

I took a last eye-blink back to'ads the scaffold. There was the three pitiful men hanging all wet and bedraggled and their necks stretched out most half as long as your arm, lak a chicken's neck when you pull it to break it.

Then it was I turnt r'ally sick and I whirlt 'round looking fo' my mammy, and I sprung quick to run away from there and spang I banged raight into the young colored man. And he put out his arm good and strong and he helt me up and I was shaking and quivering and fit to squall. I looked up at him and he didn't drap his arm but he kep' looking at me and me at him. And I was boo-hooing good and solid now. And he smilt at me. All of a suddent, chile, I didn't want to run away no mo'. All of a suddent I was fo'getting about the hanging. I wanted him to keep his arm 'round me and hold me up. He kep' looking in my eyes and I looked in hisn, and his arm was strong about me.

Then I turnt away and he walked 'long with me, holping me thoo the crowd. And my heart was beginning to sing. And it all was so sudden but just natural lak as life. Grief and woe in our two hearts had made it so. There's an old saying, says—true love's the weft of life, but it sometime come thoo a sorrowful shuttle.

And that's how I met your grandpa. Yeh, chile—and all on account o' the hanging.

Sun Go Down

A DREADFUL THUMPING AND SQUEALING were going on there in the yard in front of the Negro cabin close by the University town. Pappy was beating old Mary within an inch of her life for the way she had behaved up at 'Fessor Carrington's house. She had got all contrary up there, fighting and reaching at every dead leaf she could and pushing against the other mule Suke. And finally when Pappy and the boy had got a specially heavy load of wood on and were ready to go, she had cut up and kicked and twisted about and hung one of the front wheels under the wagon body and broke it completely down.

Now Professor Carrington who was at his typewriter in the house working on his next book had already about lost his patience at the messing and mommicking he'd seen going on through the window. So out he had come, twanging the new screen door of his fine white dwelling behind him, and after a little talk he had said he was sorry but Pappy would never get the wood hauled that way. So he had up and told Pappy he'd have to quit and he'd get somebody else to do the job. He was sorry, but that's the way it was.

The boy was now clinging to Mammy while the beating

went on in the edge of the yard, and in his mind he could still see the professor's black shiny shoes standing in front of Pappy, could smell the pine-winey smell of that fresh morning shaving lotion, and hear the terrible words.

"No wonder your mules can't pull," the professor had said. "They're starved to death. I can't be bothered any more. You'll have to take your trash and clear out." Trash.

And with his eyes stuck shut with tears the boy could see again that queer look in Pappy's face when he had wiped his hands on his trousers, taken off his hat and received the single dollar given him and said, "Thankee, 'Fessor, thankee." And then the professor had turned and gone slowly back up the incline of the woods by his house, his chin stuck down against his collar. Miz 'Fessor, a pretty white woman all lacy-gowned and with her red hair hanging down, had opened the door for him. He jiggled his hands in the air as he went in. "What's the matter, darling?" she had said. "These Negroes, these everlasting Negroes," he had said. The boy heard the words clear and sharp as razor blades against his ears. And then the door of the great house had closed behind them like the jaws of a steel trap.

Wham—wham—wham! "You bitch, you bitch!" Pappy raged as he beat the mule.

Suddenly the boy broke from Mammy wildly, grabbed up the brush broom and rushed across the yard.

"Boy! Boy-ee!" Mammy called out in horror, starting forward to keep him from attacking Pappy.

But he flung himself by Pappy and made for old Mary. Frantically he began beating her in her sightless face. The axe helve in Pappy's hand was raised for another blow, but it stopped in mid-air as he stared at the vehement boy.

"You the blame, you the blame!" the boy whined in a sobbing wrathful fury as he beat at the old mule.

Pappy flung down his axe helve and snatched the broom

away. "Stop beating that mule!" he shouted, and he drew back the broom as if to strike him. The boy looked up at him, his face quivery and jerky and the tears hot and smeared across his cheeks. He whirled away and ran across the yard toward the house. His mother reached out her arms to take him in, but he side-stepped her like a football player skeeting along a broken field and fled on around behind the cabin.

Here his little twin sisters sat on the ground where a splotch of sunlight fell from above the empty pigpen. They were pouring handfuls of yellow rain-washed sand into the mouths of two coca-cola bottles, emptying it out and pouring it in again. They kept on in grave and intense concentration at their play, not noticing him. He looked at them, his mouth widened in pain, and his lower lip held tightly under his teeth. But they were babies. What could they do?

He turned helplessly about, looked around at the earth and up at the cloudless overarching sky. He went over and plopped down on the back steps with his chin caught fiercely in his hand. The jerking of his shoulders gradually subsided, his eyes stopped their wet and hot blinking, and finally he began staring steadily out before him. The front and back doors of the cabin were open now that the sun had warmed things up, and he could see through the house to a patch of light in the yard where Pappy and Mammy were. And Mammy was talking in pleading, soothing tones.

"Please, honey, don't let it worry you so," she was saying. "Never mind, never mind—don't."

And Pappy was answering back angrily and brutally, "That's the way it is, gal, that's the way!" His anguished voice was breaking in the air. "And I keep thinking, and I keep thinking—" The voice died out, faded, and rumbled away down deep in the caverns of his breast.

The boy put his hands over his face, then peeped sideways between his spread-out fingers and kept on staring through

the house. Pappy was sitting on the wagon tongue, his shoulders bent over and Mammy was standing by him, hugging his face against her the way she had been hugging his own self a few minutes before. Old Mary and Suke were free from the wagon and at peace as if nothing had happened and were nibbling and grabbing at the dead grass along the edge of the little lane. Now Pappy pulled his head up and looked off, his great gnarled hands gesticulating and shaking in the air. And the boy could see as plain as if they were in three inches of his face those great knotted veins that stood out on Pappy's hands.

"The way that white man look at me, 'bused me—ah!" Pappy blazed out suddenly.

"Don't cry, baby, don't," Mammy was begging.

"What good do it do to try—and I try hard," he went on brokenly. "They put out the light, make the day dark like a cloud and the sun go down. They stomp on me, squash me. I'm a fool, that's what! And they ain't no hope—"

"Honey, honey," Mammy implored.

But he wouldn't stop. "Never no hope. They put a fence 'round the world and shut me out, put up palings to divide me. Today I was gonna get started—be on my way—now look! Look! I'm at the bottom, girl, and gonna stay at the bottom." And he stood up, pulling Mammy's arms away from him. But no sooner had he done so than they were back around him again, and she was gazing piteously up in his dark, working, wretched face.

"Don't look like that, honey. Your poor eyes!" Her voice was half-weeping now. "I got my arms about you, all safe, honey. I hold you tight. We stick together, we keep on sticking together, and we'll make it, somehow we'll make it."

The boy closed his fingers tight over his eyes. He couldn't see any more. He didn't want to hear any more. He felt

the gush of sobs breaking and tumbling in him, struggling to pour out through his lips. Never had he heard Pappy's voice sound like that, never had he heard a grown-up man talk like that. And then he heard the voice again, saying, "I ain't no 'count, got no manhood. If I had I'd get me a gun and go up there and—" The boy crammed his fists into his ears, sprang up and hurried off across the back yard by the pigpen.

"Make me a f'og house," one of the little twins called after him. But he made no answer as he hurried on toward the waiting, quiet woods there beyond the fields.

He wandered lonesomely about. He couldn't sit still, he couldn't stand still. The golden sun shone luminously over the great sweet gums, the white-bellied sycamores and the glistening hollies. But now he felt the chill of evening already permeating the twiggy bare branches with its icy stillness. And though the sky was cloudless, it seemed to him slaty and cold and biting and threatening a freezing sleet.

Finally he sat down on a rotting pine log where the spring before he had pried off the sappy bark hunting for flat-heads to fish with. And there he sat, his head bent over, motionless in his grief.

Soon the sounds of the woods that had quieted at his approach resumed. A sapsucker on a near-by sugar maple began giving his meticulous and stern staccato rapping again, and a few snowbirds hopped springily about on the ground, rustling and overturning dead holly leaves. And a shy towhee jumped and flit-fluttered merrily in and out of a brier thicket. Somewhere far away in the top of a dead pine a yellowhammer gave his piercing boyish call, and deep in the woods along the branch behind him the boy heard the shy fluffy brown partridges making their furtive clucking as they gathered under a dark cedar to roost. But he paid no attention to any of these familiar and beloved sounds of other days.

Suddenly an overpowering hunger came upon him, not for food or ice cream or goodies but for tobacco. A taste for it was in his mouth and throat, a fierce compelling hunger. He reached out and tore off a headed twig from a toothbrush tree and began avidly chewing it.

Mammy's voice shrilled down across the field from the house. "Boy-ee, Boy-ee!" it called. "Come get yo'self some'p'n t'eat."

He continued to sit there, thinking, and made no answer. How different everything had been for him and for Pappy just a few hours before. The day had begun joyously. Up early they were, before the cold dawn, and Mammy cooked them a fine breakfast of coffee and grits and fatback and cornbread. And after filling themselves to the brim, they were out in a jiffy to hitch the mules to the wagon to go haul wood for 'Fessor Carrington. He was planning to build his children a swimming pool down below his house. And the trees had been cut there and he wanted the wood hauled and put into his cellar, and Pappy had contracted to do the big job.

'Fessor Carrington was a much man, a dean professor or something at the University and taught the students and all. And he wrote books too—books about the Negro people—and sold many and many copies of them and made mergins of money—that's what Pappy said. Someday he'd read all these books, read what the great professor wrote about his people. Pappy had said—only this morning he'd said it—that now they had them a two-horse wagon and were getting on in the world, it wouldn't be long before they'd be well ahead of Old Hard-times and then he, the boy, could go to school reg'lar and learn to read like a house a-fire. That was a promise, and today was the start toward making that promise come true.

Yes, sir, today was going to be the day for them, the new

beginning. Of course their wagon wasn't a new and upstanding thing like a white-folks wagon you could buy there at the farm supply store beyond the University. But it was all right just the same. And the day before he and Pappy had worked hard strengthening one of the wheels that was wobbly and making it tight so it would stand up under the heavy loads that they would have to haul.

Pappy had been just about killing himself cutting crossties in the woods. And the good Doctor Hargrave up at the University had told him he'd have to quit it if he wanted to live long. So he cast about figuring what to do. Finally he'd hit on the right thing. So he traded a dog and a gun and three dollars for old blind Mary to hitch her alongside of the other mule Suke. And he bought him a two-horse wagon for eight dollars on a credit at old Eli Skerritt's sale. Now he had him a two-horse team and he was ready to step on in the world. He was now a hauling man, yes sir, a hauling man, and there'd be no more of that sweating and freezing, freezing and sweating at that killing job of hacking out the old crossties in the dripping woods. They'd do so good for 'Fessor Carrington that he'd recommend them for other jobs. And the money would pour in.

But the very first thing to happen was that the crazy old mules, especially old Mary, had caused everything to go wrong. They got one load hauled up to the cellar door, and old Mary had grabbed a big bite out of the top of one of Miz Carrington's spirea bushes and ruined it. Then 'Fessor had called through the window from where he was writing on his typewriter and said watch out. The next load they got the rear wheel hooked into one of his fine maples and tore off a big piece of bark because old Mary wouldn't pull her part. Pappy had whipped her some then, and the great man had come to the door and said "tchk, tchk" at Pappy's beating the mule. Then he had gone on back to his work. Right after that when

they were loaded up again, old Mary spilt the milk completely. She kicked and squealed out of pure devilment, broke away from the harness and lunged against the tongue, driving the wheel around under the body. And down kerblam fell the wheel with the spokes all scattering. This was too much. So 'Fessor had come out of the house and turned Pappy off, and all their dreams of a new beginning and of coming up in the world at last had collapsed to nothingness.

"Po' Pappy," the boy murmured.

He heard a rhythmic, rasping beating sound out in the fields. Looking up, he saw Pappy slowly moving along between the cotton rows, flailing down the dead stalks for spring plowing. He wasn't able to own a stalk-cutter and so the tough half of a broken shovel-handle must do instead for a flail.

The boy watched him working there. His strong long arm showered down in dogged blows upon the upright stalks. Every winter as long as the boy could remember Pappy had beaten down the stalks, working, working away. Yes, that was it, work.

"He works hard, I tell you." And the boy's voice broke the stillness as if he were arguing with someone. He sprang up from the log and began looking around him in the woods. Presently he found a tough hickory limb and finally broke it off from the sprawled dead top of the tree which had been cut down the winter before for wood. He stamped the small branches from it, went out into the field and sturdily began to work. Pappy paid no mind to him, not even so much as the flicker of an eye, but went on with his rhythmic and primitive beating, right and left, left and right, his feet moving steadily and slowly forward. Pappy soon outdistanced him, but the boy kept on working. The upper outside muscles of his arm began to ache and presently were paining him like a sore tooth. His wrist grew weak and almost limp, but he gritted his teeth

and flailed away at the endless and increasingly tough stalks.

When nightfall began to darken the fields, Pappy laid his stick aside at the end of the row and went on toward the house, his shoulders and head leaning a bit forward as he went. The boy long before had begun switching his stick from one hand to the other to ease his aches. Now taking both hands to the stick and pushing up his energy, he flailed the stalks loudly to attract Pappy's attention so that he would turn and call to him to come on to the house. But Pappy never looked around. On by the house he went and toward the barn with never a turn of his head.

The night came down and the boy's hands by now were blistered and almost bleeding. He was near to sobbing too. He glanced fearfully toward the swamps where such ghosts as the Iron-faced Man and the little Willy-wisp Girl lived. He beat his way on blindly out to the end of the row, dropped his stick and stepped painfully toward the house.

Mammy tried her best to be cheerful at supper. But after a little talk about the weather and how according to the old saying, the 'tater bugs ought to be fewer next year 'cause of the early freeze they had had, she too gave it up and ate away quietly. Pappy drank several cups of black coffee, fumbled with his bread and meat, then got up and went and sat by the fire. He took his shoes off and rocked back and forth, chewing his tobacco. All the while the boy ate his unwanted supper as best he could.

He left the table and went and sat down in front of the fire. But unlike his father he had no tobacco to put into his mouth. Nor did Pappy make any motion to offer him any as he usually did. Mammy now was busy in the back room putting the babies to bed. He could hear her talking sweet baby talk to them, and soon she began to sing them to sleep.

He got up to go into the room to kiss the twins goodnight.

"Where you going, boy?" Pappy called out roughly. He

turned, came back and sat down. For a while he stared at the fire waiting for Pappy to continue. Presently he went on. His voice was cold, crisp, and businesslike. "I've decided," he said, "we can't make nothing at this hauling business and we're going back with Graham Love and Kluttzy Trice again to cut crossties tomorrow."

"But—" the boy started to say, then gulped and stopped.

"No but about it," Pappy spoke up in a voice that allowed no argument. "That doctor didn't know what he was talking about. And what difference do it make if he did!" He struck his breast a resounding blow with the flat of his hand. "And there won't be no schooling for you this year—before Christmas nor after Christmas—and maybe none next year neither." He spat sharply toward the fire, chewed on in silence a while and then concluded, "Go on to bed now, you need your sleep. We got to get a soon start in the morning."

The boy rose and went into the bedroom. Soon he was undressed down to his long underwear, and he crawled into his narrow bed. Then suddenly he sprang out again and went over to the little trundle bed where the twins were already yawning and blinking with heavy-lidded eyes. He kissed them both on the cheek and held them so tight for an instant that they began to whine. He let them loose and popped back into his bed. Mammy came over and pulled the cover up around his shoulders. He reached out and grabbed her hand fiercely in his, holding it and smoothing it against his face. "Poor Mammy," he said.

She peered down at him, then tweaked his nose. "Poor nothing! What's come over you, boy? Forget all that foolishness. Tomorrow's another day."

"Sing me that song, Mammy," he said.

"Pshaw, chile, you ain't no baby no more," she said.

"Sing it, Mammy."

She sat down on his bed and began.

"Oh where you going, lord angel,
Your wings all dipped in gol'?
I'm bound for the River Jordan
To rest my weary soul."

Pappy's voice called from the other room, "Come in here, gal."

She stood quickly up. "Go right to sleep," she whispered. "I got to talk to your daddy."

She hurried out of the room and closed the door behind her. For a long while he could hear the two of them in there talking in low tones. At last he drifted off to sleep, a wide, vast, dreamless sleep.

Sometime later he awoke. The shrunk moon had risen and it shone through the window in a vague and pallid mistiness. At first he thought it was daybreak. Then he knew from the way the light fell by the chair and across the floor that it was the good old moon high in the middle of the sky. He listened for his father's snore. He could hear the phlegmy breathing of the twins, for already their sitting on the cold ground playing in the sand had given them the sniffles. Also he could hear his mother's deeper breathing, but not his father's. He softly reared himself up on his elbow and looked around, but only the lumpy outline of Mammy showed in the double bed against the wall. A vague unhappiness and misery were in him. Then it was that the day's experience came back to him, the full knowledge of the blasting of his and Pappy's dreams—of schooling, a new suit for Christmas and a cookstove which Mammy'd been praying for so long.

"Mammy," he called softly. But his mother's soft, deep breathing continued. Through the moonlight another light glanced and glimmered suddenly on the window pane, and he saw a big low star across the cotton patch out toward the barn. Big as a magnolia flower it was. Then the star

blacked out and reappeared again. He sat up on the edge of his bed watching it. It showed itself once more and stood steadily burning, right in the middle of where the barn should be. For an instant there surged in his mind one of the wild stories told by his grandmother about how her mammy had seen the stars fall on the world, how some of them lodged in trees and hung there, sizzling and burning, and shooting sparks and brimstone into the air, and all the wicked people had confessed their sins and joined the church from the fear of the judgment day. Then he realized that it was not a star but Pappy's lantern. He was out at the barn for some reason or other.

"Mammy, where's Pappy?" he called again.

He waited but there was no answer. Something was wrong with Pappy or he wouldn't be out there, and the night already on toward morning.

He slipped quietly out of bed, pulled on his clothes and shoes and crept from the room. Crossing the yard he saw that the light was in a stable now. He went on into the barn lot, and through the open stable door he saw a queer sight. There Pappy was working around old Mary. He had a bucket of water and a big rag and was bathing the mule's wounds and welts where he had beaten her with the axe helve. The wad of hardness which had been lodged in the boy's breast so long suddenly began to melt and all thinking with it, and tears came to his eyes.

He must have made a little whimpering sound, for Pappy looked out dully and blinked in his direction. "What you doing there—boy?" he called. The next moment he ran out of the darkness toward Pappy. "Great God!" Pappy spoke up sharply, as he jerked his head around.

"Let me help you, Pappy. Lemme."

"You scared me same as a ha'nt. Get on back to bed."

"I want to help you, Pappy," he insisted brokenly. He held out his hand. Pappy looked at him for a long moment and then without a word tore off a piece of the big rag and handed it to him. And the two of them went on bathing old Mary's wounds.

"That'll teach her a lesson, all right," the boy spoke up presently and encouragingly. Pappy said nothing. "She deserved a beating, the way she misbehaved. And she's going to be all right, Pappy. She will."

"Yeh," said Pappy. And then he added, "She's a good mule."

And when they'd wrung out the rags and dried off the hurt places, Pappy dipped out axle-grease he'd bought for his wagon and spread it over the sores with a flat little paddle.

"That'll cyore her up fine," said the boy.

"Yeh," said Pappy.

"Sho'," he murmured. "Tomorrow she won't know it."

"I want her to get well soon," said Pappy. "I'm going to sell her off and the wagon too. We don't need her."

"No, we don't need her," he said, "nor the wagon."

They were finished. Pappy stood looking at the mule. Abstractedly he picked up the lantern. But still he stood without moving. The boy looked at him questioningly. Reaching out he touched his arm. "We better get back to the house, Pappy. It's mighty cold on you."

"Boy," said Pappy finally, and he didn't look down at his son, he stared off at a corner of the stable, "I want you to remember this day."

"Yessuh," the boy said in a low muffled voice. He made a motion as if to start toward the house, but Pappy still stood as he was.

"Remember this day," he went on.

"Don't, Pappy," he whispered.

Now the father looked down at his son and his eyes were bright and stern. "You done seen what it is to be a poor

nigger. Hear me!" And turning, he strode out of the stable, forgetting to close the door. So fast he went that the cobwebs hanging down from a crack in the loft swayed in the wind. The boy stood watching him go.

And loud like thunder he had heard him.

The Wizzem-oose

HE SAT ON THE LITTLE SNOW-WHITE COT in his iron cell, naked save for a pair of white shorts which the male nurse had put on him a few minutes before. He sat there bent over, his close-cropped head gripped tightly in his big long-fingered black hands and his bare feet resting on the cold cement floor. He was tired, and a sickish sort of sweet sleepiness kept smothering and enveloping him, pulling him down in a nerveless lassitude. He finally leaned back, toppled along the cot and lay there on his side, his eyes closed.

He was walking down a long asphalt highway. On either side the cold brown fields of dead cotton and corn stalks stretched wide and faraway. He was moving swiftly along and with incredible ease. He came upon a group of dark-dressed white men working by the road. They were digging a drain ditch with enormously long-handled shovels. Then he realized he had a long-handled shovel in his hand too and was using it like a vaulting pole the way he'd seen the students do at the University and thus was moving with great leapings along the road. As he sailed past the group

of men they lifted their shovels and wiggled them in greeting, giving a loud shrill hail of "Hi!"

"Hi," he answered back.

"Where ye bound for, Rudolph?" they queried all as one.

"On down the road," he shouted back, "I's seeking for to find my Jesus!"

"Amen, amen!" they intoned in unison.

He passed a house set with white pickets. Through the windows of this house he could see a strange uncouth and huge assortment of theatrical masks, costumes, shepherd's crooks and other equipments like the stuff he'd seen them using once in a play at the University in Memorial Hall when he worked as a janitor there—except these were larger, more frightful and terrifying.

And out of the depths of the house came a voice, half-hidden and smothered as it was under the huge medley of theatrical equipment, the voice of a little white girl calling plaintively to him—"Boy-ee! Boy-ee!"

This little girl was Eleanor Carrington, daughter of Professor Carrington up at the University. He had worked for the professor some in days gone by. When he was a boy years ago he and his father had hauled wood for him. He knew the little girl then. And though she didn't say so he knew she wanted him to come and help get her doll baby out of the well where it had fallen. But he couldn't stop. He had to keep moving, keep leaping with his shovel.

The sound of the little girl's voice with its piteous appeal had set up a dreadful stifling ache in his bosom. It was the old ache, the ache he had known for so many days and nights. "Lawd ha' mercy on me!" he moaned.

He passed another house, somewhat similar to the first one but bigger and set likewise with white palings.

And hanging over the fence with a stern and iron aristocratic face was Dr. Carrington's once beautiful wife Alice,

the mother of little Eleanor. And her gorgeous red hair was a fluffy autumn cloud down on her shoulders. Her beauty now was the beauty of death. Her cheeks were high and white-painted and her eyes darkened with the shadow of the fungus of death. And she smiled at him as he leapt by, and her beauty was marred by several bad front teeth.

But the smile took the ache out of his breast. In the lightened feeling he knew again what he wanted to know. He bleated out as he vaulted past, "Please, ma'am, show me the way to find my Jesus."

The woman smiled and nodded her head like a heavy-plumed dew-draggled flower.

"Through the wizzem-oose," she said.

And a little burst of shrill giggles came through her lips. She bowed her head waggingly about and rested her fine white throat on the point of one of the palings. Her feet were jumping and her shoulders shaking with joy, but her iron face gazed out at him unblinkingly, and her white throat rested motionless on the point of the paling.

"Through the wizzem-oose," she repeated.

"Thanky, ma'am, thanky, ma'am," he said.

He went onward now in great vaulting leaps like a kangaroo. There ahead of him was a wide stretching river with a bridge across it. The river was white like milk he saw spilling from a truck once, and had a frosty sparkle on its surface in the sunshine. He sprang across the bridge and went up the incline of a hill beyond. In front of him there the road came to an end.

He looked about him. There was no river now nor any bridge, but everywhere as far as the eye could see and reaching up smotheringly about his shoulders and his face and mouth was a great frondy and feathery forest of red fern plants. This was the wizzem-oose, said the fear that chilled him through.

"Oh, oh, oh!" he whimpered in agony.

He looked to the east, to the south, to the west and to the north. He whirled about, and stood still. He stared ahead of him. And there showing clearly and almost like a twisting white worm through the wizzem-oose was a little pebbly path.

"I sees the true path!" he suddenly shouted.

His long-handled shovel was in the way now. He flung it from him and it fell far out in the ferny thicket. And as it fell, it made a noise against the earth like crackling lightning, and thunder reverberated across the sky.

He plunged up the little path and began fighting his way through the smothery ferns. And then with the medley and babblings of a multitudinous flock of clamorous and squeaking birds there came out of the ferns a bedlam of shrill voices. And among the voices he could hear little Douglass and Mary Althy calling plaintively to him—his own two little children who had been burned to death in a fire in their old shack close by the University one winter.

"Doody, Doody," they called, "Doody."

With great riving and gulping sobs he answered back, "Doody's coming, chillern, Doody's coming!"

And he floundered helplessly about trying to find them. Now he thinks he hears them just over there. He rushes there. Then he hears their voices behind him. He turns and rushes back. They're now here and now there, like the wandering rainy voices of spring frogs in the marshes.

He heard them calling under his feet. He dropped on his knees and began grabbling in the earth like a wild and maddened dog. And he kept yelling, "I's coming, chillern, I's coming to save you! Here's Doody, here he is!"

Suddenly he felt the earth heaving under him. He staggered to his feet. Coming across the great stretch of red ferns he heard the giant tread of a man. Then there was a second rocking of the earth and a second giant tread. He shrank

down smallishly into the ferns. That was the law coming after him. He knew it too well. He stretched himself out flat behind a drooping fern, and peeping forth now he saw two tall figures, tall, tall, they were. And the wizzem-oose only came up to their knees. The ferns couldn't reach high enough to choke them. And they were wearing leather boots, the men were, and were dressed in rusty khaki, carrying riding crops in their hands like the girls at the riding academy, and automatic pistols at their belts. And as they went with monstrous walking steps onward, they beat about them in the ferns with their crops.

"He's bound to be in here," said the High Sheriff in a throaty rumbling voice. And the star of authority on his shirt front shivered and sparkled and glowed.

"He's good as dead then," said the deputy. And he threw his crop from him far toward the western horizon.

"Dead in the wizzem-oose," said the High Sheriff, and he likewise heaved his crop from him across the sky.

Then as if tickled at some vast and secret joke the two of them broke into ear-shattering laughter and hurried away, disappearing swiftly over the eastern horizon and into the oncoming gloom of night.

He lay there behind the droopy fern bush, his heart lifting within him. He was free at last. He was lost no more. He felt like singing. He stood up. Night had rolled in now. He set off walking swiftly along the little path.

"But where's my Jesus?" he said to himself. And his heart was like lead again.

He came to a little ravine with the waters of a spring rushing down it. He fell on his all-fours and drank his gullet full, and stared at the little pool of water when it quieted beneath him. He could see himself reflected there in the suffused and glistening starlight—his gaunt cheeks and hollow

eyes, his close-cropped head, all showing clear, and his great muscled shoulders glistening black and naked.

He heard a laugh behind him. And there sitting on a boulder was the warden. He had a sparkling toy in his hand. It was a little electric chair that glowed with the radiance of a Christmas tree. Rudolph sat on his haunches and leaned back against the hillside.

"Well," said the warden. He was a squabby kindly-faced man. "What do you think of it?" and he jiggled the illumined electric chair up and down in the air.

"It's purty," the Negro gasped.

"You want it, huh?"

"Yessuh, give it to me, please suh," he gurgled. And he reached out his hand eagerly.

"I'll be giving it to you," said the warden. He put the shining chair into his pocket, hiding it away. "You're trying to find your Jesus, eh?" He cocked his head to one side and smiled.

"Yessuh," Rudolph said humbly.

"Well, look up. He's standing there in front of you."

Rudolph looked up, and before him stood the gentle figure of Jesus, his face sweet and smiling, his long hair parted back from his smooth forehead and his hand uplifted. His woman's tow bagging dress hung straight and foldless down around him.

"Jesus, Jesus!" Rudolph shrieked deliriously. Plunging forward he fell in front of his Saviour and grasped his pierced feet and laid his cheek against them. And they were cold, even like the rock that he had laid his face on for a pillow when he was hiding away from the officers of the law that time in the deep Cape Fear River thicket.

"My son," said Jesus tenderly.

"My Saviour, my blessed everlasting and 'bundant Saviour," Rudolph babbled and sobbed.

"Now ain't that a purty sight of love and affection," said the warden.

The great sprawled form of the Negro lay there ruined and spraddle-legged as he soaked in the sweetness of his salvation.

"Rest," said Jesus.

"Thanky suh, thanky suh," whispered Rudolph.

"He's a good man," said Jesus, glancing at the warden with his woman's great eyes.

"Ho now," said the warden. "I know what you're going to say—like some them welfare folks up there at the University—that I do wrong in killing him!"

"Yes," said Jesus.

"Yes suh, yes suh," whimpered Rudolph in a pitiful small voice. "You does me wrong."

"Evil must pay for evil," said the warden harshly.

"But he's not bad any more," said Jesus. "His hard heart has been melted down."

"That's right, he confesses his sins," said the warden, wagging his head. "And he's getting right with God. They all do, they all get ready to go—loony with religion." And the warden smiled.

"He's now converted," said Jesus.

"Sure, sure," said the warden, "found you, Jesus."

"See, here he lies, filled with strength and love and glory—clinging close to his Saviour," murmured Jesus, looking sorrowfully down at the recumbent figure.

"That's good, that's good," said the warden, "let him cling, and he'll go away easy." He looked up at the sky. "It's getting on about ten o'clock."

"He's repented of the accident," said Jesus.

"I didn't mean to kill him, suh, I didn't mean to," moaned Rudolph there where he lay with his lips pressing the pitiful feet of his Lord.

"Too bad they proved you meant it," said the warden. "Sin has got to pay for sin."

"He's not a sinner now," said Jesus.

"That's what we've got this little chair for here in my pocket," said the warden, "to make 'em change—to help 'em find their Jesus."

"He's changed in the soul," said the Saviour.

"Yeh, in the soul. That's what religion does for you—and this little chair." And the warden patted his pocket.

"And the soul is what counts," said Jesus, still looking down at Rudolph.

"That's so—that's what counts."

"And seeing he's a good man now, Warden—then why do you want to kill him?"

"Hah, hah, hah," laughed the warden, wiggling his head.

"You say sin ought to pay for sin. That's better than saying that goodness must pay for sin." His voice was earnest now, a student querying. "Do you think so?"

The warden chuckled. "Now, Jesus, you're trying to mix me up," he said.

"I'm trying to understand—just trying to understand," the Saviour answered meekly, "And I in you and you in me—and both seeking for the truth." Then he went on. "Should we not let all good men live—especially so these days? The world needs its good men, I've heard tell. Looking about me, I would venture it does."

The warden smiled at him and winked. "There you go again," he said. "And the first thing you know, I misdoubt not you'll haul off and speak a parable. They make purty little stories, but the world don't live by 'em, them parables, no siree."

Rudolph suddenly chuckled where he lay. The warden looked over at him.

"Funny time for him to be laughing. Out of his great salvation he laughs."

"I been redeemed, suh, been redeemed," said Rudolph, still lying with his face against the feet of Jesus as before. And he crooned out a little stave of song—"Blessed be the sinners that have been redeemed."

"He sees the truth now," said Jesus compassionately. And he stretched out his hand and made a sign of blessedness over Rudolph.

"And what's that?" asked the warden with a hard smile. "The truth?"

Rudolph stirred on the ground, "Tell him, Jesus," he murmured, "tell him for po' me."

"He sees that it is yourself you kill, Warden. Every time you pull that switch you commit murder—murder on yourself."

"Well, well, who would have thought it?" said the warden. "It sounds like suicide—double multiplied. Ho, ho, I made a rhyme," he crowed out.

Jesus turned and looked at him. "It shows in your eyes, Warden. Death shows in your eyes. Rudolph only dies once. Those more than a hundred men only died once. But you keep dying every time you kill a man. It enters into you—and it enters into me." He sighed and looked down again at the Negro. "The killed one grows used to death, the killer never does—except his own. There where the great killing was—in the east," and he gestured behind him, "is the deed fixed to eternity. They that were killed shall live forever in the event. And they who killed shall die daily and forever in their killing." The warden stared at him. "You are lost in the wizzem-oose, Warden," he said sadly.

Rudolph suddenly turned over, rolled away from Jesus and beat the earth with thumping happy fists.

"Here now, here," said the warden angrily, and he pulled the

electric chair threateningly from his pocket. He looked up at the sky and put it back. "Not quite time," he said.

"I'm sorry, Warden, sorry," said Jesus. He raised his gentle brownish hand and with the back of it wiped the sprouting tears from his eyes. The warden bent his head over, looking at the ground, saying nothing, waiting. Jesus looked around at Rudolph who lay stretched out, his face on his arm. "You've got a long trip," he said. "Rest now."

"Jesus, Jesus," murmured Rudolph. "Yes."

"Yes," said Jesus, "save thy soul." And he turned away and slowly disappeared into the wizzem-oose.

Rudolph felt him going. "Today I'll be with him in Paradise," he whispered to himself. A sense of sweet restfulness like the spilling of wasteful delicious sunshine crept over him and through him.

"And what do you want done with the body—send it to the University?" the warden queried suddenly.

"And that'll be all right too," said Rudolph. "Thankee, suh."

He felt himself sinking deep and deeper down into a feathery luscious darkness—deeper and deeper into the darkness which was inside himself. And that which was sinking was his own soul, his flame of life, the self itself. He knew it so. It was like a tiny illuminated moth that floated downward and ever downward into the endless dark.

What is the little moth after? Why does it float downward? Is there a current of air it rides out and over, ready to leap into the bottomless abyss? What is it doing, what is it seeking?

And look how it shines as it sinks, sinks. Its glowing little body now grows fainter and fainter to a tiny iota of light, no bigger than a pinpoint.

At the instant Rudolph saw it was about to fade to nothingness, he felt himself rushing wildly into the darkness after

this little spark—hoping to cup it in his hands, to cherish it, to keep it from going out, even to warm it in his own bosom.

For he knew now it was his own soul, his life, his heartbeat and he knew too the meaning of death.

"Save thy soul."

And in knowing the nature of death, he knew where he was as he rushed downward to save this spark of life. He was aware of that. He knew that he was in a deep dark vertical shaft, and the opening of the shaft was above and behind him. And he could feel the light of the wide-awake day there. And his awareness was of the opening as his own mouth, and the shaft or tunnel down which he fled in pursuit of the little flame-tipped spirit not yet gone out into nothingness was his own gut.

And as he fled pursuingly he heard echoes and murmurs of wild and blasphemous beings done to death coming up from the interminable darkness waiting below there—the inky blackness in which this bit of flaming soul-stuff would be extinguished forever.

And onward, ever onward he plunged. And the vertical tunnel now became a turned and twisted horizontal one as he skeeted around the curves, rushing onward after the volatile little spirit.

The little spark suddenly disappeared ahead of him into the darkness. Death!

Rudolph woke with a shriek and sat up on his iron cot. The warden was there and the deputy, and behind them in the open cell door was the preacher with his Bible.

"We're ready, son," said the warden.

"Jesus, my Jesus," moaned Rudolph.

Then he heard in the air behind him, around him, the gentle inobdurate voice that speaks from everlasting to everlasting. "Fear not, I am with thee to the end," it said.

"Thankee, suh, thankee suh," Rudolph gasped. And he straightened up, the misery slowly passing from his face.

"He's going cuckoo," said the deputy, "better hurry."

"They all do one way or another," said the warden.

They helped him to his feet. He stood there a moment, his whole form trembling like a fern plant in his dream—in the wizzem-oose. Then he began moving ahead and unafraid out of the cell.

And the preacher followed, intoning as he went, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me—"

Education South

IT WAS A BALMY DAY IN SPRING AND A FUNERAL was going on in the Negro section of the cemetery close by the University wall. And there before the open grave amid her neighbors stood a tall middle-aged mulatto woman, mother of the dead young man to be buried. Her black cotton-gloved hands were clasped tightly down in front of her. And she gazed motionless and gaunt-eyed at the coffin resting on two chairs across from her, in which all her hopes and dreams were shut forever. No tears fell from her eyes, nor did any sound of grief or pain come through her bloodless and ash-dry lips.

And the grieving song of the mourners gathered there went softly out across the spring-blossomed campus. Among the ancient leafing green trees it went and among the great gray buildings and the red brick ones and across the quiet village, gently troubling in its vibration the bees and dirtdaubers and butterflies as they sucked and played at the tender white clover on the wide commons and lawn.

The drowsy students slumped about in their chairs in the Memorial Library heard it, yawned and went on trying to concentrate on their collateral reading. And in the sleepy

classrooms it was the same—if PR equals SW what is the value of V?—If economics is a science what are the categories for the filling and satisfying of human desires?—What do the Gestalt psychologists mean when they say that phenomena are more than the sum of their parts?—Wherein does the baroque differ from the classical, whether in art or literature?

And some of the stray professors and students passing along Washington Street stopped, listened a moment, and continued their easy discursive walk toward the post office. And other citizens, stopping a moment in springtime sociability over the impending bond issue for paving this same street, grew silent, took in the protruding fact of a funeral in the distance and resumed their pro and con. A Negro funeral in the cemetery there was a common thing and had been for a hundred and fifty years. And good Negro singing was common too, as well as preaching.

And down in Professor Rochambeau DeRossett's garden an old Negro plowman too stopped his mule Reuben and listened to the mighty funeral hymn of the Negroes blown along on the gentle southwest wind. He stood with grave and high-nostriled blackamoor face, his eyes thoughtful, in which little sparks of musical delight began to show. He had wanted to attend that funeral and help with the singing. He knew they'd have good singing and good preaching at it. And besides, he had known the dead young man and his mother's high hopes for him. But 'Fessor DeRossett said be here and fix his garden, for already it was time that early sass was ready to be cut. He'd been away out west on a mountain where they had a 'scope thing to look through and measure the stars, and was late in getting back to his vegetable planting. Well, anyhow, when a 'fessor said do a thing, a man better do it, for no telling when a fellow might need a friend, a good white friend in the hour of trouble, when trouble comes, as it said in the song. And nobody could be better than a 'fessor from

the University. For such 'fessors, as everybody knew, were the most powerful men of all from far and roundabout.

"Giddup, giddup," the old man urged his mule Reuben, his voice softened down in respect to the grief and woe yonder in the distance. "Giddup, giddup," he said again, jerking and jiggling the line the while. And finally like breathing, Reuben leaned his ancient rawbony body, poor as quilting frames, against the collar, and the rickety Boy-Dixie plow crinkled the shallow-swelling ground. Then *pyang*—and the loose-hung plowpoint struck a buried rock and broke clean off. The old plowman chet-chetted with his lips and gave out a few dad-dang-its over his usual bad luck. Still, no help for it, and he would plow no more today. A fact was a fact, and an accident was an accident. 'Fessor couldn't blame him for leaving. And tomorrow would be another day. So he turned Reuben's head into Miz DeRossett's flaming pirus-japonica hedge and hurried off in long strides toward the graveyard, his tall African kingly form moving levelly along. He began humming with his powerful bass as he went, joining tunefully in with the funeral singing. He sang his dominant, dropping down easily to low C good and strong—

"The earth in dust and ashes hid
Before the awful sign,
The moon ran down in purple stream
The sun forebore to shine—
Then grieve, grieve, grieve,
For death's a hard trial."

He went on by the old Episcopal church, ivy-wrapped and haunted by chattering sparrows.

And inside the church young Reverend Walter Hanes, dressed in his black cassock, was intently and fervently holding his class for the Bishop who would be there tomorrow for the Sunday confirmation. Through the tall chancel windows

the light fell upon his slender figure, staining it in crimson and blue and splotching along the floor and on the pupils' heads all glorified.

"How many parts are there in a sacrament?" he persuasively and sweetly inquired of the young boys and girls. And they all quoted in unison, "Two, the outward and visible sign, and the inward and spiritual grace."

"What is the outward visible sign or form in baptism?"

"Water, wherein the person is baptized, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost."

Mr. Hanes turned and pulled a little side window quietly closed to shut out the sounds floating in from the Negro graveyard. "The distant tumult and the grieving," he said shyly. He went gently on. "What is the inward and spiritual grace, Kenan? Suppose you tell us."

And Professor Allison Haywood's little son looked thoughtfully before him and began to make answer—"A death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness: for being by nature born in sin, and the children of wrath, we are hereby made the children of grace." Young Mr. Hanes looked his appreciation at Kenan and for an instant glimpsed in his mind far ahead a bit of bright future for this little lad.

"I don't hear 'em singing in the graveyard now," Kenan suddenly said.

"No, we don't hear them now," said Hanes. "And you, Willene, what is required of persons to be baptized?"

And Willene Blount, daughter of Dr. Phillip Pressmore Blount, President of the University, bent her tiny head in confusion the while Kenan looked protectingly and lovingly at her. Finally a mouselike running little answer of "Repentance whereby—they forsake sin—and faith so they believe—the promises of God—" came out of her lips.

Young Reverend Mr. Hanes listened pleasantly and happily as he stared out through the little window at the tender

greenery of the campus, still hearing the now faint singing of the Negroes in the distance. He stood and listened, and quietly wondered. A moment he stood and listened so, then lifted the prayerbook and began reading, "Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples—"

And out over the quiet University campus the funeral singing continued, filtering in through the doors and windows into professors' offices, the dean's sanctum, the president's office, the laboratories and into the basements of the different buildings. And the Negro janitors stopped pushing their brooms along the halls for a while to listen. They would have been at the funeral too, but this was a young outside fellow being buried there and they couldn't afford to use up one of their rare leave days to attend. There would be enough of their own folks dying and being buried as time passed.

And through the open windows of the classrooms where the young white men, the keepers of tomorrow and the burgeoning South, were being trained in the way they should go, the music drifted—

"The bells of death ring in the night
To wake men to their doom,
Bright sparkles in the churchyard shine
To light them to their tomb—
Then grieve, grieve, grieve,
For death's a hard trial—"

And the young teacher of Philosophy 16, Larry Patterson, a recent Ph.D. from Yale, stared out over his class of some dozen young men in Logical Principles and fixed his heavy-spectacled eye upon a troubled student named Maybanks who sat blinking in the air and gulping helplessly as the words bombarded him. "I will repeat the question," said Patterson. "You may remember," he said, "at least I hope you remember,

that the subject we are trying to discuss deals with what *is* versus what ought to be. Now I ask you, Mr. Maybanks, or rather do you think so—that whatever is is what ought to be; or should what *is* be improved upon?—Or in other words, is there a dichotomy—a Greek word meaning a division, a cutting, a cleavage—and again I remind you that Greek is a language all of us should give part of our time to acquaint ourselves with—yes, in other words, is there a dichotomy, a division, a separation, a difference between the actual and the moral world? Do you get the question?—Between the actually existing world that is, I say, and the one that morally ought to be?"

His big bulbous, near-sighted eye, slightly derisive, and slightly sardonic, dug deeply into the flinching soul of Mr. Maybanks who wagged his head, shuffled his big Carolina plowman's feet and in a halting voice confessed he didn't quite get the question—sir. Professor Patterson sucked in a lungful of air, slid down the window and in the quieter room now said he would repeat the question. "Pardon the interruption from the outside," he added. And Maybanks pushed his gaze out through the window and on over to the alumni building. A red-headed sapsucker was sitting on one of the chimneys, and he fastened his helpless gaze on the bird and held it there as Professor Patterson began again.

And beneath the bird in Room 203 Professor Mangum Barrett, a little spry, gray-faced man was stepping up and down in front of his Greek literature class "riding" a ministerial student by the name of Ferrell. "*Hos ephato klaion epi de stenachonto politai,*" he was intoning fiercely. And Brother Ferrell, planning to be a missionary to far away China and a master of the Septuagint some day stared at his page of Homer in grim swelling silence. "Translate, translate," Professor Barrett pleaded.

"So spake he—so spake he," stammered Ferrell, and then

his words drowned in helpless silence again. Professor Barrett shook down his spotless cuffs and finger-gripped them against the butt of his tobacco-stained hands, turned and with a sudden soft southern drawl went on gently and persuasively, "Go ahead, Mr. Ferrell."

"And thereunto the townspeople, the townspeople—" stammered Ferrell, and once more the faint trickle of his learning died in the sands of his vast ignorance.

Professor Barrett reached over and took the book from Ferrell's rawboned hands. Stepping back he pulled the window abstractedly but bangingly down, and leaning against the wall in the quietness began to read. "So spake he, wailing, and all of the men of the city made moan with him—*Troesin d'Hekabe hadinou exerche gooio.*" He stopped, his face easing, tasting deeply within himself the beauty of Homer and the glory and vitality of a civilization dead. "And Hekabe led in the wild lament. My child, alas my child, wherever should I live in my sore anguish now thou art perished who wast my boast both night and day in the city and a blessing to all."

And so Professor Barrett went on reading Greek, and as was his wont took time out to berate our present civilization awhile, especially the poor deluded and misguided South, and pay his fealty to another. He compared the foolish lament and grieving for the dead out there in the cemetery near the wall with the beautiful and mighty sorrow of the ancient Greeks.

And abruptly he went on in loud sonority with, "*Ten de kat' ophthalmon erebenne nyx ekalypsen, eripe d' exopiso, apo de psychen exapysse*— Then dark night came down upon her eyes and shrouded her away in its blackness, and she fell back, backward and gasped forth her psyche—spirit. Far from off—wildly—her head she cast the gay bright garments thereof, the frontlet and coif and kerchief and woven band, and the veil that golden Aphrodite had given her on the day when Hector of the glancing helm had led her forth as his

bride from the house of Eetion, after he had given her bride-gifts untold."

And in Davis Hall, Room 106, the Ethics professor and rising village capitalist, Dr. Samuel Powers Everett, was telling his young disciples that the ethical life is the only good life, the only life that pays. "*Gnothi seauton!*" he said. And then he chuckled and asked a soft, quiet, redheaded boy on the front row, named Lowe, if he believed in God. The young man raised his startled, modest glance, adjusted his tortoise shell glasses and said he did, yes, he believed in God.

"You believe then that God is all-powerful if he is God?" Professor Everett queried innocently as he broke a piece of chalk in his strong square-fingered hand.

"Yes," said young Lowe a little apprehensively, trying to be wary of the trap and deadfall of this man, for he knew his campus reputation for deep and devious logic. But then who could be ridiculed for believing in God. And if God was God, then by definition he was perfect and therefore all-powerful. So Lowe relaxed and sat back and waited for the next finger punch below the belt.

"You see," said the professor, and his blue eyes with all their David Harum craftiness hid far away in them looked benignly out at the roomful of students. "So you see," he said, "Mr. Lowe says he believes God is all-powerful. How about you, Mr. Erwin?" And Professor Everett touched a snow-white handkerchief along the edges of his trim military-cut mustache.

"I certainly do," said the young man. And then he thought, and then agreed with himself inside that it was true. "Yes," he said, "God is all-powerful." The professor chuckled, the class looked expectantly out. "Well," said Professor Everett grinning, "we all seem to be orthodox Christians this morning. That augurs well for the salvation of the world. Excuse me a moment while I close the window. And will you close that

one, too, Mr. Feldman?" Several students sprang to close down the windows, but Feldman was spasmodically first. "Quite a display of grief out there this morning," Professor Everett said. "They too are calling on their God. It is a universal subject—yes. Well, this quietness is more conducive to thought," and he went on with a chuckle, "The increased gloom also. Our windows need attention badly. Quite likely the washer is still celebrating our last week's athletic victory." And then he fired his question into the air—"You say you believe God is all-powerful, Mr. Lowe. Do you believe the Deity could cook breakfast with a snowball?"

The class sat for a moment in hushed delight. Ah, Dr. Everett! What a one he was for standing you on your head! Of course God couldn't. The snowball would melt. Then the babel of argument began, the pros and cons, the question of laws of nature, whether God could disrupt these laws, whether they were stronger than he was, and so on and so on. Professor Everett took his seat, sat back and presided easily and happily over the ferment of young minds and the vociferousness of tongues. And redheaded Lowe sat bent and silent, aflame with a mixture of embarrassment and admiration. This, according to Dr. Everett, was the Great Process, the Hegelian Dialectic, the *aufgehoben* of the growing soul. This was getting educated, being prepared for life.

And up in the sky-lighted room of Morehead Medical Hall the Anatomy Class under the instruction of young Dr. Robert Lee Lauder was busy dissecting away on the great sprawled and rigid ruined cadaver of Rudolph the Negro murderer. For as the University catalogue declared—"The body is studied by systems. First the bones, then the muscles and finally the central nervous system itself. And the student does much of the dissecting experimentally." During the entire scholastic year Rudolph and Rudolph alone had furnished himself as the sole specimen and means of study for the anatomy students.

Executions had been rare in the state recently, nor had any beggars died homeless and unknown along the public highways to be picked up and carted away. For prices had been rather good, both of farm and textiles as well as heavy industry, and consequently crime and misery had lessened. Professor Lauder, the instructor, stared through the window and down toward the cemetery in the distance where the collection of Negroes were officiating at a burial. A regretful look was in his face that the dead person was being buried yonder in the ground rather than furnished here where he was so badly needed—to help further the understanding of anatomical facts and the necessary art of healing.

He moved back into the room. "We turn our attention now," he said, "to the cerebral hemispheres. In the case of Rudolph you will notice how extraordinarily large they are, though as those of you familiar with his story may know, that fact did him little good." And smiling ironically with his fine clear gray eyes, he proceeded to the serious business of the lecture.

And in Graham Hall Professor Allison Haywood was holding his class, Pedagogy 73, the same being The Curriculum, Its Principles and Practices. "One of the basic difficulties in building a proper curriculum for the teacher," he was saying, "arises from the fact that there seems to be a difference between the subjects of study which are culturally broadening and those which are practical in their benefit. There seems to be a battle going on between, for example, the humanities in university life and the vocational and technical disciplines. As, well you might say, a devotee of both, I feel the dilemma in a rather personal way. Excuse me a moment." He rose, moved across the room, and raised the window higher. He stood a moment listening to the music coming from the cemetery. The students watched him and smiled. They knew his weakness. He was caught in the pull of the singing and his

avocation as student of Negro and folk mores. "I've decided to let you young gentlemen go somewhat early today," he said a little shamefacedly.

And with that he gathered up his papers and hurried from the room. The young men clattered down the stairs like a gang of heavy-footed goats, but Professor Haywood had already got his hat and notebook and was ahead of them on his way to the graveyard.

And in the cemetery the tall mother stood as before, her eyes dry as whip sockets. But the two old grandparents of the youth kept weeping softly and unashamedly away, as did some of the tender-hearted neighbors. The singing had stopped now and the old Negro preacher, pastor of the church where the boy and mother were members, was reading gently and consolingly from the open Bible in his hand. "Blessed are they that mourn," he read, "for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." The gentle words broke sweetly in the soft still air. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your father which is in heaven."

The mother had heard the Sermon on the Mount many a time before. But the words now read again and here on the occasion of her great tragedy brought her a vague but authoritative comfort. They had an even more holy sound here in the midst of her grief than ever they had before. It was almost as if a kindly and familiar hand had touched her or even a sheltering and protecting arm had reached around her. The tight black-gloved hands began to relax, and presently she pushed her wadded handkerchief against her mouth and closed her eyes. The melt of moisture was beginning to form beneath her lashes.

The old preacher closed his Bible and spoke gently. "Our young brother was cut off in the full promise of his prime," he said. "The cold wind of death has nipped the bud of his

young days. And even as it is writ, he that goes down to the grave, shall come up no more and thou shalt seek me in the morning but I shall not be. But even say so, I know that my Redeemer liveth and that I shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin, worms destroy my body to pieces, yet in my flesh shall I see God. Let us pray."

All but the mother bowed their heads. Her eyes were still closed. "Our Heavenly Father," he prayed, "we know that we are nothing. As a flower soon cut down or as a wind what comes and is gone and known no more, we are nothing. Thou art all. Thy ways are mysterious and past our feeble understanding and we can only trust and believe in thee. And oh, Father, teach us faith. Teach us to be humble and accept the good and the bad alike, the dark days and the bright days, the sunshine and the rain. For as we love thee, thou certainly lovest us. And in thy love thou canst do us no evil. And I most specially pray thy comfort on this grieving mother. Let her see that all is for a purpose. And that her boy was needed in Paradise else thou wouldst not have sent for him. Teach us patience, acceptance of thy will. Even as she has lost a son, yea the more surely she shall find her eternal father. We ask it all in the name of our sweet Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen."

"Amen," said the mourners.

And then the scene was energized to action. The coffin was let swiftly down into the grave, the boards were crossed over it and the digging shovels began to pile the dirt rapidly in.

"Ashes to ashes and dust to dust," intoned the preacher as the first thr-r-ump sounded.

The old plowman led forth in a hymn now, and the people joined richly and sonorously in. The shovels kept vying with one another as the song went on.

"Well King Jesus said, said 'Gimme some rest,
Some rest from earthly trile,'
And the words come back from the father's throne—
'A little while, in a little while.'
Then blow the trumpet and shout the praise,
And ring the bells of heaven roun'—
Old death gonna be my folding bed,
Lie down, lie down!"

The mother opened her eyes. The grave was filled and being roached up now by the patting shovels. The pine headboard and footboard were put in place. A few of the neighbors came forward with handfuls of redbud sprays, golden bell and winter jessamine and a few broken branches of sweet breath of spring which they laid on the mound. The mother saw Professor Haywood behind the group around the grave. He had arrived just before the song began. Her boy would have been pleased to know that the great Dr. Haywood had come in honor of his funeral. He had read one of Dr. Haywood's books he'd borrowed from a Negro teacher and thought it was wonderful. It told all about what the Negro in the South must do to raise himself. The water in her eyes formed a little faster. She wiped it away with her handkerchief. The song went on, and then as some of the group shifted about she saw Dr. Haywood more plainly. He was standing with one foot on a low tombstone and had a small notebook half-hidden in his hand, and he was writing in it. She knew he was copying down the words of the song. He was always like that, collecting knowledge—learning, learning.

The song ended, the funeral was over, and the neighbors began to drift away. Most of them had jobs around in the community as cooks, yard men or cleaners by the odd hour, and they had to get back to their work.

Dr. Haywood slid his notebook into his pocket and came

toward the mother. He had his hat off now in respect to her and the occasion.

"I'm sorry—sorry to see this, Mary Lou," he said. She nodded. "It was, it was—" he went on a little haltingly.

"Her son, Tom," said Grandma. "He was nineteen."

"Tom!" he said shocked. "I hadn't heard of it, Mary Lou."

"Yessuh," said Grandpa, wiping his old red-rimmed eyes, "Tom it was. I named him when a baby. He was a good worker." The two old people were eager, voluble before the impressive professor.

"Yes, a good worker," murmured Professor Haywood. He turned and looked heavily at the flower-spread grave. "Last winter he raked the leaves out of my yard."

"He ketched his death up there at Davis Hall a week ago—that cold day, suh," said Grandpa.

"He was washing the windows and a chill struck him," said Grandma.

"Bad, too bad," said Professor Haywood grievingly. Then his voice rose irritated, a touch of anger in it. "Why didn't he take better care of himself. He should have! Yes. Why didn't he!"

"Yessuh," said the grandmother, "but he was working to save up his money, suh."

The gaunt tearless eyes of the mother looked over at Dr. Haywood. "He was planning to go up north this fall," she said, "where he could start to college."

Dr. Haywood was silent a moment. He stared at the ground, then turned aside and put on his hat. But he didn't go away. He stood there. Presently he said, "I hope you'll let me know if I can help you in any way, Mary Lou—I'll speak to Mrs. Haywood. Perhaps she'd have some extra work for you—or something. I'll speak to her."

"Thank you, sir," she said.

A moment more Professor Haywood stood there. Then he

went off across the cemetery, his steps quickening as he walked. He touched the notebook in his pocket. The new song he'd copied was a real find. It would just fit into chapter five of his new book on the Cultural Backgrounds of the Southern Negro. But strangely the fact brought him no elation. He mounted the front steps of Graham Hall, then looked back toward the cemetery. The place was deserted now except for the dark straight figure of the mother who still stood by the grave in wordless communion with her son. He went on into the building. The bell was already ringing for the next class.

For the first few minutes the lecture on Mental Tests as Necessary Aids to Social Guidance went rather lamely, as if something were bothering Professor Haywood. But then as he warmed up to his subject he became his old dynamic self again and went breezily along.

Such Stuff as Dreams

HE TWISTED AND MOANED FOR HOURS ON his hard boardinghouse bed. At last he fell asleep. And there again, oh, horrible, the dreams consuming him.

He was walking down a long street. The midday sun beat upon him pitilessly, and the dark-mouthed houses on either side with their sharp and symbolic palings were hushed and closed and the crepe was hanging on the lintel posts.

Oedipus the lost and Electra the hungering one! Crepe that is the bandage after the bloody event!

There was no sign of any living thing, nor was there any noise of man's labor anywhere. The grass on the lawn was black and dead. And the burnt and crisped leaves of the trees along the smooth-surfaced sidewalks rattled and shivered mournfully in the hot wind that fanned his face. And as the wind blew gently and sickeningly upon him, he heard little mocking whispers coming from behind the closed blinds of the dwellings, and he felt pairs of leaden eyes peering through at him.

Guilty at the prisoner's bar!

But he turned neither to the right nor to the left. He would

find the answer to what he was seeking there where a heavy-porticoed building rose dimly at the end of the street.

The sexual incline up, and sexual decline down. And if level, still the sex caress. The yearning mother body—oh! Lost child go home!

As he went along the street the sky became overcast, save for the spot where the sun stared through a veil of mist with the yellow face of an evil and powerful old man.

And the world seemed alive with a dreadful hissing, hissing at him, the peering baleful eyes all tongued.

He mounted the steps of the building, passed between the columnar orifice and lips, and entered through the massive iron door hymeneal. And the vituperation of the dreadful city pursued him no more. He stood in a long windowless corridor, unlighted save for a grayness that trickled mysteriously down from the unseen ceiling. He walked rapidly on, his steps making no sound on the squashy red tile floor.

But memory remains, vestigial touches of the limbo that precedes.

He heard a low moaning coming out of the shadows before him. It grew louder and louder as he approached. And soon he found it proceeded from behind another but smaller iron door at the end of this corridor.

And on this door was a dark wreath hanging, and the lintels on either side were inscribed with strange characters, cuneiform, hieroglyphics and thus symbolized. He grasped the round hard knob, likewise symbolic, with eager hands.

Pervert! Pervert!

Then from beyond the door the muffled voice of his dead father rushed out to him in a strange and terrifying scream. "For the love of God, stay away!" He pushed the door farther and farther open. Again came the horror-stricken voice, "Stay away! Stay away!"

And suddenly he heard a vast drumming of wings and a

squeaking, followed by a deep grinding sound, like the rumble of the great albatross under the sea and the earth. And then the grinding rumble burst through the floor in front of him, became a flash of lightning and a pain that entered his head. Too late he threw out his arms to protect himself.

He awoke with a low scream and lay gasping for breath in his hard bed. Through the window he could see the red dawn coming up in the east. He was drenched with sweat, and the sheet was wet under him. He sat up and with trembling pallid hands pushed back the damp-dewed hair from his forehead. He felt for the switch and finally turned on the light. Like a man avid and starving, he reached a cigarette, lighted it and sucked the smoke deep down inside himself. He held it there compressed. He got up and stripped off his pajamas and rubbed himself dry with a towel. And standing in front of his mirror he looked at his naked body. Slowly he let the purged bluish smoke curl out of his mouth. Then he sucked in another and deeper draw.

He fumbled at his old dresser and got out a fresh pair of pajamas. They were new and had never been worn. His mother had sent them to him the day before. He slowly pulled them on. Here the handiwork of love, the stitch and tuck of faith unutterable. The sacrifice. Money borrowed from the bank. The eggs and butter sold. And he a failure now so miserably. How could he ever face her again—the beloved toil-worn hands!

He took the pajamas off and crawled back under the covers. He was cold. His teeth were chattering. He rolled his goose-pimpled body tight up in the sheets and quilt. Then he reached far over and cut off the light and lay there in the darkness.

And now as of other nights and horrifying morns the bump began, the pounding and the bump of his racing heart. He turned on the light and lighted other cigarettes and smoked and smoked. Broad day came into the room. The sun was ris-

ing, and outside in the elm and maple trees the chilly birds were awake and foolishly chattering. Presently the great college bell would toll, and the little village and the campus would come alive with hurrying students and professors and workers.

He got up and stood at the window naked and looked out. There to the north of the town was a great stretching of wild woods. He kept staring at these woods.

He picked up first one thing and then another and laid it down—his brush, comb, his shirt. He pulled his new leather belt from his trousers, smoothed it a moment in his hand and then flung it from him. He sat awhile polishing one shoe and then repolishing it. The landlady came to the foot of the stairs and called that it was far past breakfast time. Finally he managed to pick up his belt and dress.

At the table he couldn't eat. The bread choked him. The eggs made him gulp with nausea. The good landlady sat across from him, staring at him. She shifted her heavy weight in her chair. He began to sweat with embarrassment.

"When you first came here, you weren't like that," she said, "—just a year ago."

He moved his chair back to be gone, but she put out her hand admonishingly in the air.

"Tell me," she said.

What could he tell her!

"You used to act sensibly, eat like a boy ought to eat and sleep," she went on. "Now you don't eat. And at night I hear you turning and moaning and shaking in the bed up there."

He could feel her keen, excellent eyes on him.

"I've written to your mother," she said.

He sprang to his feet terrified.

"I've asked her to come up here."

He gazed at her with stricken face.

"I wrote yesterday. You need her."

He turned helplessly about, tried to speak, and then dashed from the room. A moment later she heard the outside door close behind him. With a sigh she got up and began to stack the dishes.

He came into the open country and followed an unused road toward the woods. The stretch of windy sky with white clouds falling always to the east gave him no elation now as of former days. Nor did the melancholy glow of the sun and the broken, moving patches of light and shadow in the valley and over the upland broomstraw fields bring any flash to his dull eye.

He began quoting mechanically from old Breton—

"On a hill there grows a flower,
Fair befall the dainty sweet,
By that flower there is a bower
Where the heavenly muses meet.

"In that bower there is a chair,
Fringèd all about with gold,
Where doth sit the fairest fair
That ever I did yet behold."

He took in great drafts of fresh air, as if stifling. The road grew rougher, small boulders stood up jagged, gray and uncouth in the roadbed where the soil had been washed away.

At a small stream three yellowing willows hung over with their branches dipping the water. He stopped under them, got down on his belly and drank until his teeth ached with cold. Then he turned sharply off to the right and followed a little path that led farther into the woods. The dry leaves crackled beneath his feet, and here and there a jay bird screamed in sharp-eyed irritation at him.

A long twisting vine, scarlet with berries, its foliage gone save for a blistered leaf or two, hung down across his path. Far away the college bell was ringing to class. Dr. Winford would now be standing in front of his lecture desk. "The sound student of psychiatry will as a scientist consider that the free associations of the dreamer are a vital part of the manifest dream content. Only so can the esoteric matter lie open to analysis."

His hand went out and began stripping berries off the vine and squeezing them. He looked down at his hand with a shock of horror. The red guilt and blood of murder! Dr. Winford's voice saying, "I'm sorry to have to speak to you again." The syndicated article had been pushed aside and the professor stared up at him where he stood.

"I know, I know I'm doing badly," he had said. And he wrung his hands together anguishedly.

"Are you dreaming again?" said Dr. Winford.

"Yes, yes sir."

"I thought we were safely over that."

"They're terrible," and he shuddered.

"Go ahead," said Dr. Winford.

"I'd—I'd rather not, sir."

The look had been stern. "The unconscious must be pierced, loosened so that the supercharged ego may pour itself out and relieve the mental pain caused by this incarceration of the psyche."

"I was floating on a cloud."

"Yes."

"High, high in the sky." Notes were being made on a pad. "I could hear songs."

"Songs," said Dr. Winford.

"Like angel voices in harmony. And the sun then came up from the world below, a great round face, smiling, peeping over the horizon."

"A face," prompted Dr. Winford, writing, "smiling."

"And the face had a mouth and it was open."

"And dark?"

"Yes, dark, like a cavern."

"Ah-hah."

"Then I woke up." He was sweating where he stood.

"That recurrent symbolism of evasion," said Dr. Winford kindly. "The cloud, the floating, the pink light. Evasion?"

"Yes sir," he said, swallowing and gulping.

"We must resume our sessions," the professor said. He looked at the pad, turned several leaves, murmuring to himself—hmn, hmn— "What about four o'clock, Monday? We would have an hour."

"Yes, sir."

"Four o'clock it is then." As he started away, Dr. Winford called out— "And the sun's face—did it resemble anyone you knew?" He stopped, his back toward the professor, and bent his head. "Don't tell me," said Dr. Winford. "I'll tell you—your father."

He nodded sorrowfully and ashamed.

"Yes, sir," he said in a low voice, "I think so."

"Monday at three," and the professor's manner was swift, conclusive and clinical.

"I thought—I thought you said four, sir."

"So I did, so I did," said the professor, and he resumed his writing.

He started away, then turned piteously back.

"But, but my father died when I was only two years old," he stammered.

"I know, I know. You've told me that."

"I couldn't have—have felt animosity, could I, sir? Oh, could I?"

"Ah," said Dr. Winford dismissingly.

He turned in the path where he stood as if enraged. He

rushed back toward the vine with the scarlet berries. Seizing hold of it with all his reckless murdering might, he brought it down in wide coils about him. And lastly fell the heavier top with its tendrils clasping tiny dried twigs in their clutch. He grabbed handfuls of the berries, crushed them furiously and flung them aside. And brutally he stamped the heavy top.

He turned and plunged through the deep woods toward the higher and wilder hills.

The valley below was almost dark now, and the lights from the University town far down there were gleaming up through the blue night mist. He closed his smarting eyes and leaned against the rough bark of the sheltering oak tree. He heard water flowing over the rocks in the little creek a hundred feet below. For hours he had walked and fled. His body was tired, his legs were sore. A crowded, packing and pulsing blood hammering kept going in the back of his head. He twisted his neck and shoulders, trying to ease the pain that was blinding and crushing his brains.

The darkness came on more thickly. Only a veil of white fog in the valley showed where the land fell away before his feet.

He was shivering with cold. He looked around him and up at the sky. A cloudy grayness had crept in from the west.

It began to rain with tapping drips, chilly sliding sounds against the leaves and bark of the trees. Under the jagged edge of the cloudy curtain to the east, the queer shaky moon came reeling up and peered over the rim of the valley. He stood up now under the old tree, his face haggard in the silvery light. The visage of that senseless flat orb mocked him fearfully.

For a long while he stood there. Lonely as the last man in the world! And the great oak tree with its powerful outreaching limb above his head sheltered him.

His lips began to recite words with the voice of a stranger,

a man standing outside of him and at a distance—a poem he had loved—

> "I am also called No-more, Too-late, Farewell;
> Unto thine ear I hold the dead-sea shell
> Cast up thy Life's foam-fretted feet between;
> Unto thine eyes the glass where that is seen
> Which had Life's form and Love's, but. . . ."

And his tired and bloodshot eyes traveled slowly up to the limb.

Dr. Winford looked up from his desk as the old janitor came in to sweep.

"They've found him," the old man said. Dr. Winford stared at him. "In the woods to the north," he continued. "He hanged hisself."

Dr. Winford started violently. "No," he said, "no—impossible!"

"With his belt," said the old janitor.

"He was not the type, I tell you, not the type!" The professor's voice was high and vehement as he spoke into the air. "I couldn't have made such an error in diagnosis."

"A suicide," said the janitor as he began sweeping the floor. "The cor'ner said so. His mother's over in the infirmary."

Dr. Winford gazed through the window with his piercing gray eyes at a pair of squirrels cavorting back and forth on a winter limb.

"What you reckon would make a young fellow do that?" the old janitor queried. "Life is a fine thing to live and he had the future ahead of him. What you reckon made him do it?"

Dr. Winford kept staring through the window.